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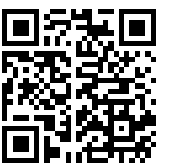

LILY AND NANNIE AT SCHOOL

A STORY FOR GIRLS

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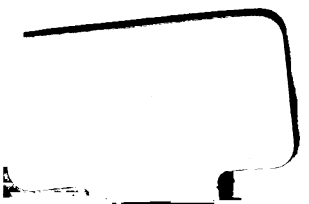

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MY LAST NIGHT WITH AUNT ALICIA.

FRONTISPIECE. [*Page* 147.

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LILY AND NANNIE

AT

SCHOOL.

A STORY FOR LITTLE GIRLS.

BY

ANNIE Lane BUCKLAND.

MANCHESTER:
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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
SAD TIDINGS	5
SHOWERS AND SUNSHINE	15
THE FIRST SUNDAY AT SCHOOL	36
CARROTS AND TURNIPS	51
THE POSTMAN'S KNOCK	64
THE SECRET	80
THE HAYMAKERS	91
BREAKING UP	112
THE HOLIDAYS	119
AN EVENING WITH LADY MARCH	126
THE FEAST IN THE BOX-ROOM	150
LILY IN TROUBLE	168
SOME EXPLANATIONS	179
GOING HOME	194
CONCLUSION	221

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LILY AND NANNIE AT SCHOOL.

CHAPTER I.

SAD TIDINGS.

THE Christmas holidays had passed away, and the cold winds of March were blowing lustily when, one day, near the conclusion of that month, mamma entered Lily and Nannie Warrington's room, as they were dressing for dinner, and told them to come as soon as they were ready into her dressing-room, as she had something particular she wished to say to them.

"Oh! Lily," said Nannie, "I do believe mamma knows that we have not got up when we were called lately, and have had to come down-stairs without washing our necks."

"I do not think it is that," replied Lily. "Perhaps Mrs. Manning has sent to invite us to a juvenile party, as she did last year."

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They had soon completed their toilets, when, just as they opened the door of their room, they saw papa coming up-stairs.

"Papa," exclaimed Nannie, "mamma is going to tell us something in her dressing-room; can you think what it is?"

"If I were to be allowed half a dozen guesses," replied papa, "I think I might perhaps hit upon it; but come along," continued he, taking a hand of each of his little girls, "we will go and investigate mamma's terrible secret."

Mamma was sitting by the fire, reading a letter, and as they entered she looked up and smiled when she saw papa, saying, "You are just in time, James, to help me to break the sad tidings to the poor children."

"Well, I have brought two brave little girls with me, so I do not think we shall have any fainting or hysterics; at all events," said he, taking up the water-jug, and swinging it backwards and forwards, "I am now prepared to give a cold bath to any one who may require it."

"Oh! papa," cried Nannie, "please don't throw water over us; we will promise to get up in

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time to wash our necks every morning if you won't."

"Ha!" said papa, "a new crime come to light; but that is not what you are now indicted for, so you need not plead guilty, Nannie. Come, mamma, please to reveal this mystery to us," and sitting down, he put one arm round each of the little girls, and drew them to him.

"My dear children," began mamma, "I am going to tell you something that I am sure you will not at all like to hear." And she stopped.

"Mamma and I do not at all like to hear or think about it either," said papa, "but we try to bear it as well as we can; and though it looks very like an ugly black cloud, shutting out two bright little stars from our sky, we shall believe the little stars are still twinkling there, and that the black cloud will soon pass away."

"What is it?" asked Lily, in a trembling voice, while Nannie looked up at papa in alarm.

"Why, my dears," began mamma again, "your papa and I both think—although we

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shall feel so much at parting with you—that it is really necessary for a time; you know you have been very irregular in your lessons lately, and have got sadly behindhand."

"We may as well have the worst at once," interrupted papa; "so, to be concise, mamma and I are going to send you to school. You may depend upon it we do not want to get rid of you, my pets; but after a great deal of talking and thinking, we cannot find any better plan, and therefore hope it is the best; and now, mind, nobody is to cry until I begin. When you see me flourish out my pocket-handkerchief, then you may get your own ready, for I am the monarch, you know, and you are all my slaves, so you are only allowed to imitate what I do; please, therefore, to follow me down to dinner;" and he gave mamma his arm.

"Where is the school, mamma?" asked Lily, as soon as they were seated at table.

"The one upon which we have fixed, my dear, is Mrs. Stafford's, at Bath. It will not be very far from grandpapa's, and Aunt Sarah has promised to come over frequently and see you."

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"Aunt Sarah! That will be very nice, mamma," said Lily; "and I suppose we shall go sometimes to grandpapa's?"

"Are they great girls there?" asked Nannie.

"There are sixteen pupils, including yourselves, my dear," answered mamma, "and I believe they are of all ages."

"Some of them, no doubt, are delightful little creatures, just ten years, with blue eyes and long light hair," said papa; "very like what I am looking at now."

Nannie smiled, and then said, "Mamma will go with us, won't she?"

"I think not," replied papa. "I want so much to see these sixteen charming young ladies, that I am going to give myself a holiday for the purpose, and shall therefore take the opportunity of conducting you myself."

"And Aunt Sarah is going to meet you at Chippenham, and will go with you to Mrs. Stafford's," said mamma.

"How soon shall we go?" asked Lily.

"To-morrow fortnight, my dear, is the day I have fixed, provided I can get you ready by that time," replied mamma.

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"Shall we have some new things, mamma?" inquired Lily, eagerly.

"Yes, my dear," replied mamma. "The spring will soon be coming, and though I shall send your warm frocks and cloaks, yet I must also provide you with some suitable for the summer."

"The summer!" exclaimed Nannie; "are we to stay there until the summer-time? I did not think it would be so long as that."

"Oh," replied papa, "as the poet says—

"'In books, and work, and healthful play,
The days will fly so fast,
We shan't believe on breaking-up day,
That they can all be past.'"

"Papa!" cried Lily, "you have made that up yourself. I am sure the "Busy Bee" verse goes on quite differently."

"Ah!" said papa, "I suppose I am like that gifted young man, Mr Hiram Adolphus Dawkins, who could not refrain from talking blank verse in the bosom of his family."

"I have every reason to believe that you will be very happy there, my dears," said mamma, "and that you will not find the time long. Papa

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called on Mrs. Stafford when he was in Bath, the other day, at the Assizes, and from what he saw of her, as well as from what I hear of her from others, I think she must be a most kind and estimable woman. She takes, as I told you, only sixteen pupils, and she endeavours in every way to make her house as much as possible like a home to them. One evening every week you will write home, and the others you will spend with Mrs. Stafford in needlework, while some interesting book is read aloud. It will be very pleasant to have some companions with whom to study, and I have no doubt you will get on very fast. Mrs. Stafford has a nice garden behind her house, and in fine weather it will be very agreeable to play there, or sit under the trees."

"The fact is, if you go on any longer, my dear," said papa, "I fear when I get there I shall not like to come away again. I wonder if Mrs. Stafford would take me as a pupil?"

"Oh! papa," exclaimed the little girls; "but you would know so much more than any one else in the school; more, very likely, than Mrs. Stafford herself."

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"Not so much on some subjects, I expect," replied papa. "For instance, I should not in the least know how to manage sixteen troublesome young ladies! I am thankful that my 'limited number' is only two, for they are quite as much as my powers are equal to."

"But, papa, don't you remember you said just now that they were such charming young ladies, and that you were going on purpose to see them?" said Lily.

"Ah!" replied papa, "I believe I did; but I wish still more to accompany my own little girls, and to see that they are happy and comfortable there."

A great deal more conversation passed respecting the school, at different times during the next fortnight. Mamma and the little girls tried to be as cheerful as they could about it, and papa did his very best to keep up their spirits.

There was a great variety of purchases to be made, and a quantity of work to be done. Hats were to be cleaned and retrimmed; new dresses chosen and made up; a sufficient store of tapes, cottons, buttons, hooks and eyes, &c.,

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laid in to last for three months; a neat little writing-case to be filled with letter-paper, envelopes, and postage stamps. All these things served to divert the children's minds, as similar trifles often do those of older persons under deeper grief.

Of course Alfred and Herbert had to be informed of this remarkable event, and Lily communicated the news to them in the following letter:—

London, March 31st.

MY DEAR ALF AND HIB,—I hope you are both very well. Nannie and I send our love to you, and I now write to say that we are going to school. It is Mrs. Stafford's, Pulteney Street, Bath, so please direct the next letter you write, after Saturday week, there. We are having such a number of new things, and mamma, and Nannie, and I are so busy. We have new straw hats trimmed with white, and green and white mohair frocks, and such a quantity of tape, pins, and needles, all in a little box. So I remain,

Your loving sister,
LYDIA MARY WARRINGTON.

To this epistle Alfred, a few days afterwards, returned the following reply:

April 4th.

MY DEAR LILY AND NANNIE,—I received your letter of the 31st instant, and I am precious glad you are going to school; I hope you will find that you make

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progress in your studies, and give satisfaction to your parents, but whatever you do, don't get *missified* like that Caroline Thompson, who spent the day with us last summer. We send our love to papa and mamma, and our cake has been gone more than six weeks! Yesterday was foot-ball afternoon, and jolly fun we had; to-day Professor Green is engaged to deliver a lecture on Vegetable Physiology. Dick More's sister is at school at Mrs. Stafford's. I dare say you will see her, you will know her because her name is Nelly, and she has light hair and eyes; but she was fourteen years old last January, on the 26th inst. Dick says she is A 1. Remember when you go that it will be ten weeks to the holidays, and then we shall all come home.

Hurrah!
I say,
For that day.

Hib sends his love, and he wants to know if Bath-buns are cheaper than 2d. in Bath. Mind you get to be Captain before you leave the school, and I remain

Your affectionate brother,

ALFRED HENRY WARRINGTON.

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CHAPTER II.

SHOWERS AND SUNSHINE.

THE fatal Saturday morning at length arrived. All the packing had been completed the night before, and the inventories of the contents of the large black box and of the trunk had been fastened inside the covers, while mamma attached the keys by a black ribbon, and hung them round Lily's neck. Nothing remained to be done but to fasten the umbrellas together, and to put the directions on the packages.

They were to start by an early train, in order that papa might return the same evening, so that it was scarcely light when Bennett came into the little girls' room and told them they must get up, for breakfast would soon be ready.

They did not need to be awakened, for they had scarcely closed their eyes the whole night, and now the sad but exciting event seemed very near indeed.

"Good-bye, little room," said Lily, as they

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left it, equipped for their journey. "You will not see us again till the summer-time comes."

Papa was already in the breakfast-room; but he told them that mamma had slept badly, and he had therefore persuaded her not to get up so early; they were to go to her, however, as soon as they had finished breakfast.

Papa poured out some hot coffee for them, which they drank; but a strange something which seemed to come up into their throats made it impossible for them to swallow any of the more substantial bread and butter and cold ham which he placed upon their plates.

They could not speak a word, and papa also was unusually silent, until at length he said: "The time is getting on, I think you had better go and say good-bye to mamma."

At these words poor Nannie could keep it in no longer, but burst into a passionate flood of tears, sobbing violently, in which she was immediately followed by Lily also.

Papa got up, and taking hold of each of their hands, said, very quietly—

"Now, my pets, you may cry as much as you please, because, though it distresses me to see

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you so unhappy—and it's infectious, too, but it will not do me any harm—I am quite sure, however, when I tell you that it will hurt dear mamma to see you like this, you will do all you can to be calm when you go to her."

Somehow it seemed as though papa's telling them to cry as much as they pleased made them able to stop it far more than if they had been desired to leave off; so, after a few long breaths, they rubbed their eyes, and papa, kissing them, said: "God bless you, my dear little girls, and make you His children for ever. Now run to mamma."

"Good-bye, dear mamma," said they, as they jumped up to the bed to kiss her.

"Good-bye, my dear children," replied she. "I had thought of many things which I wanted to say to you before you left, but there is no time now. Perhaps this, however, is enough—Always remember that you cannot take care of yourselves, or keep yourselves from evil; but that God, your Father through Jesus Christ, is always able and willing to do this, if you ask Him."

"Yes, mamma," said Nannie, "and we will

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ask Him; for you know when we are away from you and papa we shall have only God to take care of us."

How often did mamma recall little Nannie's words that morning. At first, to encourage hope and confidence, when she at any time felt anxious about the welfare of the children, and then afterwards—— But we will not look forward. Papa's voice now called from the hall that the cab was at the door, and in a few minutes they were driving to Paddington.

It was a thorough April day, and as they got into the open country, near Swindon, papa pointed out a rainbow to the little girls, and told them that it was a sign that the showers would soon be over, and a promise of bright skies and sunshine to come. This seemed to be already somewhat realised, when the train entered the station at Chippenham, and they caught sight of Aunt Sarah's smiling face, and heard old Thomas's delighted exclamation of, "Here they be, miss!—I see 'em as nat'ral as life."

The guard came and opened the door of the carriage, and Aunt Sarah got in, while Thomas

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put a large brown-paper bag through the window, saying, "It's nuts, my dears, nuts as Betsey have made herself, real genewine ginger; not like them you buys in the shop; for, says I to Betsey, they'll be a bit down-hearted like, and they are uncommon comforting, as who should know better than I? for last Michaelmas, fifteen years ago—I can mind it as well as if it were yesterday—I was courtin' Betsey, you see——"

"Are you going on?" asked the guard.

"No, to be sure," replied Thomas, "or I should ha' known better nor to stand here, Mr. Guard."

"Give our love to grandpapa and grandmamma, and to Betsey; and thank her for the gingerbread nuts," cried the little girls from the window, as the train set off.

They soon reached Bath, and in less than a quarter of an hour afterwards found themselves at Mrs. Stafford's door.

They were shown up-stairs into the drawing-room, where they found Mrs. Stafford engaged in conversation with another lady. She was accompanied by her daughter, and they both

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turned round and stared at papa and Aunt Sarah as they entered the room; nor did Lily and Nannie escape a severe scrutiny.

"I see you are engaged," said Aunt Sarah, to Mrs. Stafford; "so, if you will allow us, we will withdraw to this end of the room, until you are at leisure."

Mrs. Stafford bowed, and apologising for keeping them waiting, placed seats for them in a sort of inner room, which had once been divided from the other by folding doors, but these had been taken away, so that it was impossible to avoid hearing all that passed in either.

Lily and Nannie amused themselves, therefore, with looking about, and listening to what was passing in the larger room. And first, Mrs. Stafford claimed their attention. They remarked that she looked very kind and nice, and had a peculiarly clear sweet voice in speaking, so that, although she never raised it, every syllable she uttered could be heard at some distance.

Her visitor was a very different looking person. She was a large stout woman, with a fat red face, set in a border of short black curls,

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finished off at the top with a great bouquet of yellow chrysanthemums. Another bunch of the same flowers was placed upon the exterior of her bonnet, while on one side drooped also a large yellow feather. She wore a purple velvet mantle, over a green brocaded silk, so that she somewhat reminded the little girls of the parrots and macaws they had seen at the Crystal Palace. Her daughter was a short stout girl, with a round white face, and very pale grey eyes, she wore her hair quite turned back from her face, which was singularly destitute of any expression.

"And now, my dear," began the lady, turning to her daughter, "haven't I got something else that I wanted to complain about to Mrs. Stafford?"

"I am almost sure there was something else, ma, but I can't remember now what it was."

"Then if you should think upon it, you can write and let me know, my dear," replied the mother, "and then I'll write about it to Mrs. Stafford."

"Very well," said the young lady, "I dare say I shall think of it before long."

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"Now mind, Mrs. Stafford," began the mother, "there's her beer, that she's to have; she's to be put on in her music; she's to practise dancing twice a day; and I wish her to dine at one."

"The last is impossible," replied Mrs. Stafford, "I will endeavour to attend to your wishes in the other respects, but I cannot disarrange my household plans for the sake of one pupil, Mrs. Cotton."

"Well it's worth your while, I am sure, Mrs. Stafford," said Mrs. Cotton, rising, "to give us satisfaction, and secure our patronage, for Eliza Jane learns all the extras, and we pay well for them too."

Mrs. Stafford bowed, and inquired how long Mrs. Cotton would stay in Bath.

"I think to leave in about an hour," replied Mrs. Cotton; "but I shall take Eliza Jane out with me first, to walk about a bit, and look in at the shop windows."

"I shall probably see you on your return, then," said Mrs. Stafford, pulling the bell.

"I may as well say good morning now, and have done with it," answered Mrs. Cotton;

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"for very likely I might be in too much of a hurry to step in when I come back;" so, bidding Mrs. Stafford good morning, she marched out of the room, followed by her daughter.

Mrs. Stafford now entered the inner room, when papa said—

"These are the two little people about whom I spoke to you a few weeks ago, Mrs. Stafford; I am afraid you will find that they have not made any very great progress on the road to learning, but they mean to try and get on as fast as they can, and to attend to all your wishes."

"I have no doubt," replied Mrs. Stafford, "that we shall soon become good friends, and I hope they will be as happy here as they can be anywhere away from home."

"They are not usually very low-spirited," said Aunt Sarah, "and I have no doubt will soon feel quite at home with their young companions."

"And now," said papa, "I think, with your leave, Mrs. Stafford, I will take these young ladies out into the city, and show them some

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of the wonders of Bath, while you and Aunt Sarah have a little talk together."

So papa and the little girls made acquaintance with the fine old Abbey, Sidney Gardens, the Park, and the wonders of Milsom Street; returning to Mrs. Stafford's just in time for her two o'clock dinner.

As soon as dinner was ready, Mrs. Stafford conducted them to the large dining-room, where, down both sides of a long table, the young ladies were already assembled.

"Mademoiselle Planché, and Miss Jackson," said Mrs. Stafford, introducing the French and English teachers; then, turning to Lily and Nannie, she continued, "I shall not go through the ceremony of introducing you to your young friends now, my dears, as you will have better opportunities of making their acquaintance by-and-by. You will, of course, like to sit near your papa to-day; will you, therefore, take your places here."

The little girls felt much too timid to examine the long row of faces opposite to them; but they could not help wondering which might be Nelly More. Just in front sat the stout,

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white-faced girl whom they had seen in the drawing-room that morning, and knew to be Miss Eliza Jane Cotton; while next to her was a young lady who looked about fourteen, and who had grey eyes, but they certainly were not pleasant ones, for they seemed to look everywhere at once, and to see everything; she had, too, what some people might politely call "light hair," but more plain-spoken individuals would have denominated it "red," or "carroty." This hung in long ringlets around her thin face, sharp-featured, and with high cheek bones. Could this be Nelly More? On the other side of Miss Cotton they presently remarked another young lady, apparently also about fourteen, but whose eyes were of a decided blue, and whose hair might truly be called golden. She was not pretty, but the expression of her face was so bright and amiable that the little girls could not help hoping that this was the real Nelly. Of the others they could see but little, as they dared not turn their heads to look down the table.

After dinner papa and Aunt Sarah took their leave, the latter promising to come over and see Lily and Nannie before long.

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As soon as the farewells were over, Miss Jackson told the little girls to come with her, that she might unpack their boxes, and show them where to place their things.

The sight of the various little articles, which they had seen mamma place with her own hands in the boxes, brought the tears afresh into their eyes. Miss Jackson attempted to comfort them by the usual assurance that the time would soon pass away; and so, perhaps, it might to her, but the two months that seemed to her so short, appeared a terribly dreary, long time to the little girls.

There were two other beds in the room to which Miss Jackson took them, besides the one in which they were to sleep. One of them, Miss Jackson said, was Miss More's, and the other Miss Annie Shepherd's, whom she had no doubt they would find a nice little companion, as she was about their age.

Miss More, of course, must be Nelly More, thought Lily and Nannie, but they did not like to ask Miss Jackson anything about her.

There was a place for everything, and when everything had been put in its place, and they

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had been informed that a fine would be exacted for everything left about, Miss Jackson proposed taking them to the school-room.

"It is a half-holiday this afternoon," said she, "being Saturday, so you will have a better opportunity for getting acquainted with your companions."

She then took them down a long passage, and opening a door at the end, they found themselves in a large room, furnished with book-shelves, forms, three or four tables, and hung with maps. Here most of the girls whom they had seen at table were assembled, sitting together in little groups, reading, working, or writing. Lily and Nannie sat down side by side on one of the nearest forms, grasping each other's hands, and feeling very lonely, timid, and uncomfortable.

They had not sat here many minutes before Miss Cotton and the young lady with the red hair, who had sat next to her at dinner, came up arm in arm, and, seating themselves beside the children, the latter began—

"Well, my little dears, and from what part of the universe did you come?"

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"From London," replied Lily.

"I saw you in the drawing-room this morning," said Miss Cotton. "I suppose that was your papa and mamma with you?"

"No," answered Nannie, "that was not mamma. It was papa and Aunt Sarah. She met us at Chippenham, and came on with us, and she is coming to see us very often."

"What are your names?" inquired Miss Cotton.

"My name is Lily Warrington, and hers is Nannie; and, if you please, what is yours?" said Lily.

"Mine," replied Miss Cotton, "is Eliza Jane, and this young lady is my very particular friend, Priscilla Steele. Her papa is a surgeon, and mine is an independent gentleman."

"Our last cook was an Independent," remarked Nannie. "She asked mamma to let her go to the Independent Chapel on Sunday evenings."

"What!" exclaimed Miss Cotton, with as much astonishment as her fat face could express. "Do you imagine that my papa is a dissenter, Miss Warrington? What I mean

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is, that he has no call to work for his living, like most people."

"What is your papa?" inquired Miss Steele.

"I do not know exactly," replied Lily; "but I once heard mamma say he was at the bar."

"At the bar!" exclaimed Miss Cotton, "then he must be an innkeeper."

"We do not live at an inn," said Lily; "but papa goes into London every day to his chambers."

"There always are chambers at inns," observed Miss Steele, "and a chamber-maid."

"Yes," said Nannie, "papa certainly has an inn, for he often speaks of it; and, don't you remember, Lily, it is called Gray's Inn."

"Did you ever!" exclaimed Miss Cotton.

"No," replied Miss Steele, "I never did. It's a downright disgrace to the school."

"I'll write and tell ma, the very next Wednesday as ever is," said Miss Cotton, "and I know she'll take me away."

Just at that moment the third young lady whom Lily and Nannie had remarked at dinner-time, entered the school-room.

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"There's Miss More," exclaimed Miss Steele. "Let us go and tell her. I am sure her father did not pay Mrs. Stafford's high terms for her to associate with innkeepers' children."

"A select establishment!—limited number, indeed," said Miss Eliza Jane Cotton.

So, crossing the room, they informed Miss More in a loud whisper that the father of those two little girls, who had come to-day, actually kept an inn in London.

"Isn't it low?" said Miss Cotton.

"They look like two nice little things," replied Miss More, "and their papa, certainly, both in manners and conversation, had all the appearance of a gentleman."

"That may be," answered Miss Steele; "but that has nothing whatever to do with it. We must make a stand against such an intrusion as this."

"Certainly," said Miss Cotton; "society demands it of us, as mamma says; and now the rest of the girls will be sure to follow us, if you will only agree to unite with us in never speaking to them, or taking the least notice of them. In that way, you see, Mrs. Stafford will

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NELLY MORE INTRODUCES HERSELF TO THE NEW PUPILS.

[*Page* 31.

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soon find out that it won't do to try that sort of thing in this establishment."

"You may be as unlady-like and as unchristian as you please," replied Nelly More, indignantly, "but you will not find me ready to help you in either, Miss Cotton. If the children are vulgar and ill-behaved, that is a sufficient reason for not taking much notice of them; but allowing it to be a mistake that they are here, it certainly is not in any way their fault, and I am not going to see the poor little things unhappy, if I can do anything to prevent it. Where is my child?" continued she, looking round. "Here, Annie Shepherd, my dear, come with me and talk to these two little girls."

A little bright-looking dark-eyed child of about nine years old came up, and Nelly More, taking her hand, led her to where Lily and Nannie still sat, crying bitterly, and exclaiming, "O papa, papa, I wish you would come and take us away." Nelly More put her arms around them, saying, "Come, do not cry; you are going to be my children while you are here, you know, that is, you are going to sleep in my

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room, and I shall take care of your things, and see that you put them away. Look here," continued she, "this is one of my little girls."

"Yes," said Annie Shepherd, "and Miss More is so kind, and we do have such fun sometimes."

Lily looked up and smiled at Annie Shepherd, and then brightening up, she said, "Oh! Miss More, your brother's name is Dick, and he goes to school with Alf and Herbert, and they said we should know you, because you had blue eyes and light hair."

"Then you see we know one another already," replied Nelly More.

"Yes," said Nannie, "we were wondering which was you all dinner time, because there are so many with light hair and blue eyes, and Alfred talks so often about Dick More; but I should not have liked to have seen him climb up the leaden pipe and cut his name on the spout, should you, Miss More?"

"I am so used to Dick's pranks ever since he was such a little boy, that I think it would take a great deal to alarm me now," replied Miss More. "He always manages to escape injury."

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Little Annie Shepherd here whispered to Nelly More, and, disappearing for a few minutes, soon returned with a large doll, which she proceeded to exhibit to the admiring eyes of Lily and Nannie, and so fascinating were the charms of this young lady, and the splendour and variety of her wardrobe, that the little girls could scarcely believe that the afternoon had passed away when the bell rang for tea.

As they went down-stairs to tea, Lily and Nannie could not help overhearing one or two whispers of "innkeeper's children;" and when they all took their seats at the tea-table, no one seemed to be disposed to make room for the two little strangers, until at length Mrs. Stafford, inquiring their age, bade them take their places next above Annie Shepherd. Everything seemed so cold and strange, and even those who were most kind to them evidently did not regard them at all in the same light as papa, mamma, and Aunt Sarah had done.

Their little hearts were so sad, that it was with difficulty they could swallow the tea set before them, while they, at the same time, resolutely resisted all persuasions to attempt

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eating any of the thick slices of bread and butter, which they were astonished to see some of the girls devour so heartily. Bed-time at length came on, and the prospect of the lonely, dreary night, away from papa and mamma, did not contribute to lessen their sadness, although Nelly More and Annie Shepherd attempted to cheer them up by talking of all the various pleasures they had to look forward to, and by assuring them that they had felt quite as miserable for the first few days.

"It is of no use," whispered Nannie to Lily, after they were in bed; "I knew we never could be happy here; we must be as good as we can, and try to bear it."

"I wish papa would not keep an inn," said Lily. "I shall write and ask mamma to ask papa not to do so any longer."

"But I am quite certain," replied Nannie, "that papa never would do it if it were wrong. Oh! my dear papa," sobbed she, "you are ten thousand times better than all these hateful great girls."

"I do not think that it is wrong," said Lily; "but I think it is considered vulgar."

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"I do not in the least care what they consider it," replied Nannie; "but I know it is not vulgar, or papa would not have one. Nothing shall make me believe that papa and mamma do not know a great deal better what is right and proper than Miss Cotton and Miss Steele."

"People may think differently about things," said Lily; "and after all, you know, we have never seen the inn, and perhaps it is only that papa goes there to stay while he is in town. I shall certainly ask mamma about it when I write."

"And, perhaps," said Nannie, "even if papa has an inn, God will make the girls like us, just as He made the Egyptians like Joseph and Moses." And thus, endeavouring to remember the sunshine in the storm, they fell asleep.

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CHAPTER III.

THE FIRST SUNDAY AT SCHOOL.

It was from dreams of home and happy scenes in which papa and mamma were present with them, that the bell aroused Lily and Nannie the next morning. They did not at once realise what had actually happened; but first there came a wretched consciousness of something unpleasant—so different from the glad feeling with which they had been accustomed to greet each new day—then it was with some surprise they found themselves no longer surrounded by the well-known objects in their dear little room; and lastly succeeded the full awakening, as the many events of yesterday rushed into their minds. It seemed at least twenty-four days ago, instead of twenty-four hours, since they had ran up-stairs into mamma's room and received her last kiss; and the figures of papa and Aunt Sarah, as they parted from them in the hall down-stairs, seemed to have become quite misty from the distance of time intervening.

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"Good morning," said Nelly More, coming up presently to their bed, and kissing them. "Did you hear that bell? It is to tell us that it is time to get up. It usually rings at six; but I suppose because Sunday is a day of rest, they allow us another hour's sleep. It will ring again at eight, and then you must come down to breakfast, so jump up, or you will not be in time."

At eight o'clock they all assembled in the dining-room for prayers and breakfast. The latter was scarcely commenced when the servant entered with a tray, on which lay several letters.

Mrs. Stafford took the letters from the tray, and read out the names of Miss Vincent, Miss Manners, Miss More, and—The Misses Warrington. This was indeed an unexpected joy. Mamma had promised that they should receive a letter from her every Sunday morning, for they had been accustomed to read the Bible with her on Sunday afternoons, and she had engaged to send them every week the title of the chapter she wished them to read, accompanied by such remarks as she might have made to them upon it; but they had scarcely

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anticipated that she would have commenced so soon.

I shall not insert any of these Sunday letters here, because I do not think that whilst my young readers are engaged with the story of Lily and Nannie at School, they would give due attention to mamma's counsels and teaching; but I may perhaps put the letters altogether some day, so as to make a Sunday book of them.

This letter, as you may well imagine, brought the tears into their eyes, and the smiles upon their faces too, as nothing else had done since they left home.

After breakfast Mrs. Stafford gave each of the young ladies a passage of Scripture to learn, and when these were repeated, she went to the piano, and they all joined in singing some hymns, until it was time to get ready for the morning service.

Mrs. Stafford had two pews in the place of worship where she usually attended; but there was not quite room for all the young ladies in these seats, so that two of them were always obliged to go into the pew beyond, which be-

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longed to an old lady, a friend of Mrs. Stafford's. As they were entering the seats Miss Cotton and Miss Steele pushed on a little, and were about to go into the farther pew, when Mrs. Stafford, calling them back, desired Lily and Nannie to take their places there. The two friends looked not a little displeased at this, but of course they were obliged to obey.

At the top of this pew Lily and Nannie noticed an old lady. She was dressed in a large old-fashioned black silk bonnet, and had perfectly white hair, and remarkably bright blue eyes. She sat up as straight as an arrow, and never once leaned back against the cushion. She wore a stiff black silk dress, also, that looked as if it could have sat up quite as firmly, even if the old lady had not been inside of it. In her hand she held a large prayer-book with gold clasps, from which she read all the responses in a loud stentorian voice; and joined with many curious turns and runs in the chanting and singing. Every now and then she would look sharply round, in order to see if a little girl, who sat beside her, was attending to the service. This little girl in many respects

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much resembled her. She had the same bright eyes, but perfectly black hair, and her light, erect little figure was of course not nearly so angular as that of the elder lady.

Next to the little girl was a lad about fifteen, in a blue jacket and bright buttons, whom Lily and Nannie decided to be her brother, for he had the same dark eyes and black curly hair.

If they had been speculating as to the relationship of the old lady to the two their curiosity would have been soon set at rest, for during the service, when the collect for the day was about to be read, the little girl, turning round, exclaimed, "Grandmamma, Jack is reading the eleventh Sunday after Trinity;" whereupon the old lady, reaching forth a large ivory cane, expressed her displeasure at this inattention, by a few decided taps upon Mr. Jack's shoulder.

The novelty of the scene, the presence of these companions, and many thoughts of home and papa and mamma, diverted Lily and Nannie from that quiet and thoughtful attention to which they had been trained. Directly

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the service was over their young companion jumped upon the high hassock, and began looking about everywhere over the congregation, and then, just as Lily and Nannie were leaving the pew at a sign from Mrs. Stafford, she nodded to them three or four times, saying in a loud whisper, "Good morning, good morning; I shall know you to-morrow."

As they were in the school-room after dinner, Annie Shepherd said to Lily, "Did you see how cross Miss Cotton and Miss Steele were when Mrs. Stafford sent you and your sister into Lady March's pew instead of them?"

"No," replied Lily; "I did not notice it."

"Oh, but they were," said Annie; "they were as sulky as could be all the service time, for I watched them."

"But you should not have done so," answered Nannie, "for, you know you could not attend to the service yourself, while you were watching them."

"I expect I paid quite as much attention as most of the girls," replied Annie, "excepting Miss Vincent; but can you think what made Miss Cotton and Miss Steele so angry at not

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being allowed to sit in Lady March's pew as usual?"

"No," said Lily; "what was it?"

"Why, do you know," began Annie, "they actually think that Master March admires them very much, and they always want to push on and get into that pew."

"Admires them!" said Nannie. "What do you mean?"

"Why, don't you know," replied Annie; "they think that he thinks that they are very pretty?"

"How can they possibly know what he thinks," said Lily; "I never heard of anything so ridiculous."

"Do you think them pretty?" asked Nannie.

"I!" answered Annie; "no, indeed—I think they are complete frights, both of them. Now, I do call Miss More pretty, don't you?"

"Yes," said Lily, "I think she is; she has such nice hair, and she looks altogether so pleasant, that I like to look at her."

"So do I," replied Annie; "but she never thinks anything about it herself. She thinks a great deal more about being kind and good,

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than about other people's opinion of her; but Miss Cotton, and Miss Steele, and Miss Manners are always talking about such things. Miss Manners thinks her bonnets and dresses are the prettiest in the whole school."

"Who is Lady March?" inquired Lily.

"She is a friend of Mrs. Stafford's," replied Annie; "and I think her husband was a general in India. I know she has lived there a great deal, for she often talks about it when she comes here to drink tea. I have heard Mrs. Stafford say that she is nearly eighty years old. Those are her grand-children whom you saw in the pew with her. Their mamma is dead, and their papa is in India, so they live with their grandmamma."

Mrs. Stafford now entered the school-room, and desired all the young ladies to bring their Bibles, and read the Scriptures with her. They were going through the history of the wanderings of the Children of Israel in the wilderness, and the lesson for to-day was the account of the completion of all their toils and fears in the passage across the Jordan into that glorious land for which they had so long hoped and waited.

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As Mrs. Stafford glanced through the forty long years of weary wandering, and described how lightly it would be regarded by those who entered the land that day, she remarked, that thus we often look back upon the various rough passages through which we are called to pass in life's long journey, forgetting all that was unpleasing and trying at the time in the peace and joy of brighter scenes, or remembering it only to bless God for the good lessons and holy influence of the difficulties and trials. This will be still more the case, continued she, when, if we are God's children, we reach the promised land, our Heavenly Canaan. Now we often feel inclined to say—

"Where is the land with milk and honey flowing,
The promise of our God, our fancy's theme?
Here over shattered walls dank weeds are growing,
And blood and fire have run in mingled stream.
Like oaks and cedars all around,
The giant corses strew the ground;
And haughty Jericho's cloud-piercing wall
Lies where it sank at Joshua's trumpet call.

"Where is the sweet repose of hearts repenting;
The deep calm sky, the sunshine of the soul?
Now Heaven and earth are to our bliss consenting,
And all the Godhead joins to make us whole.

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The triple crown of mercy now
Is ready for each suppliant's brow;
By the Almighty Three for ever planned,
And peace behind the cloud held out by Jesu's hand.

"Open our eyes, thou sun of life and gladness,
That we may see that glorious world of thine.
It shines for us in vain while drooping sadness
Enfolds us here like mist; come power benign,
Touch our chilled hearts with vernal smile;
Our wintry course do Thou beguile;
Nor by the wayside ruins let us mourn,
Who have th' eternal towers for our appointed bourne."

Lily and Nannie could not help feeling, as Mrs. Stafford was speaking, that perhaps some day they might look back upon the trials and vexations of their present position as only small stones, troublesome to walk over, but soon passed, and left behind, or even helpful in urging them forward on the journey, and making them cast some longing glances on the home before them. When Mrs. Stafford dismissed them, she told them that as it was so mild and bright an afternoon they might walk in the garden until the tea-bell rang. So Lily and Nannie, taking mamma's dear letter, which they had scarcely yet read, walked up

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and down one of the paths together, dwelling with delight upon each affectionate counsel and instructive remark. Just as they had finished reading it, Annie Shepherd joined them, saying: "Let us stay here. Do not go near the arbour, for Miss Cotton and Miss Steele and some of the great girls are there, and they are so cross. They told me to go away to my friends the inn-keeper's children, and Miss Steele calls you the Black Swans. Isn't it a shame? Don't you hate them?"

"Oh!" said Lily, "how difficult it must be to be good here! It was so different at home; there every one helps you to do what is right, and even then it is often very hard; but here, where it seems as though people wanted you to do wrong, it must be almost impossible to help it."

"Oh, I never try," replied Annie. "I let things come just as they will; sometimes I am good, and sometimes I am naughty, just as it happens."

"But God will help us, Lily," said Nannie; "and the more hard it is the more He will help us."

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"It is all very well for grown-up people," replied Annie, "to be very good, but I do not think God expects little children to be like that, especially when we are at school. There is so much to be done all day, that there is no time even to think about it."

"But we need only do our lessons, and everything else we have to do as well as possible, and be truthful and kind, and loving to everybody," said Nannie. "God does not wish us to do anything else, and we have quite time enough to pray to Him every night and morning, and to ask Him for His help when we want it."

"Well, but that is not the way people are good," replied Annie; "Mamma knows a lady who is very religious, and she spends all her time in going about and visiting the poor; and she gives them almost all her money, and wears such shabby dresses, and oh, such a ridiculous bonnet, you can't think. I would not be like her for the world."

"I should not like to be like that, either," said Lily; "but I am sure all good people are not. Aunt Sarah goes to see the poor people

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at Ethelston, but she wears very pretty bonnets; and Mamma is very good, but she does not go to see poor people, excepting just now and then, when one whom she knows is ill, or in any trouble."

"If," said Nannie, "we come to God through Jesus Christ our Saviour, and ask Him to have us for His children, then He will give us His Holy Spirit, and we shall do what is pleasing to Him. That is the way Mamma says to be good; and then, when we die, we shall go to live with God in heaven. Would you not like that, Annie?"

"I do not know exactly," replied Annie. "I like being here very much. I remember a long time ago I used to want to go to heaven; it was before I came to school, and my nurse used often to talk to me about it, and tell me my little sister, who died when she was a baby, was there. I had not any one to play with then, so I used to wish I was with my little sister. And I remember there were some beautiful blue hills that I could see from the nursery window, far away in the distance, behind which the sun used to set, and I always thought that heaven

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was out there. Since then I have forgotten all about it."

"Little Uncle Willy is in heaven," said Nannie. "Mrs. Willet told us such a pretty story all about him when we were at grandpapa's last Christmas.* The servant let him fall down when he was a baby, and he could never walk about at all."

"Do tell me about it," said Annie.

"Yes," replied Nannie, "I will some day when we are going for a walk, if you will walk with me."

"And I will tell you the story of Miss Ffooks," said Lily; "it is such a funny one."

"There is the bell!" exclaimed Annie; "let us run in as fast as we can, and see if we cannot be down in the dining-room the first."

After tea they all attended the evening service. Lady March and her grand-children were not out, so Lily and Nannie were alone in her pew, and found less to divert their thoughts from what was going on than in the morning. The

* See "Mrs. Willet's Story" in "The Little Warringtons."

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sermon was from the words: "Fight the good fight of faith;" and many of the remarks were so striking and simple, that they seemed to carry them away in their hearts with them when they returned home.

Thus closed the first Sunday at school.

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CHAPTER IV.

CARROTS AND TURNIPS.

THE next morning, as Lily and Nannie were crossing the hall to go to the school-room, the drawing-room door was opened, and Lady March and Mrs. Stafford came down-stairs.

"And you must keep a tight hand, my dear," said Lady March, "for she is as wild a little colt as ever you attempted to drive. I scold and scold, and sometimes I think I have got her, but she is off again in a moment; but, there, her father was just like her, and see what a dear, good fellow he is now."

"When does Jack sail?" asked Mrs. Stafford.

"He leaves for Southampton on Saturday," replied Lady March; "and perhaps, Mrs. Stafford, you will be so good as to allow Gertrude to come to me on Friday evening, and remain until Monday morning. They worry me out of my life almost, those two; but it will be dreadful work to get on without them, too."

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The little girls did not hear any more; but a few minutes afterwards Mrs. Stafford entered the school-room, accompanied by Gertrude March. She looked around her with the most perfect composure, and, nodding to Lily and Nannie, said: "I told you I should see you to-day. I am coming to school here, because grandmamma and that stupid little Miss Wilson cannot manage me any longer at home."

The teachers and pupils all looked at her with astonishment; but Mrs. Stafford quietly remarked: "There is nothing at all unusual in that, my dear Gertrude. Many little children give their friends at home a vast deal of concern and trouble; but we are so used to it here that you will find it neither surprises nor troubles us in any way."

The school was divided into two classes, the first of which was taken by Mrs. Stafford, the second by Miss Jackson, and each by Mademoiselle Planché in turn. This was the arrangement for the morning. In the afternoon Mrs. Stafford usually sat in the dining-room, where the different masters gave their lessons.

Lily and Nannie, Annie Shepherd, Gertrude

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March, and two other little girls, Margaret and Alice Dawson, formed the second class; while the first consisted of Miss Cotton, Miss Steele, Nelly More, Miss Vincent, Miss Manners, with five other young ladies, whom it is needless to name, as they have little to do with our two heroines.

"Oh, that dreadful French!" exclaimed Lily, when school was over. "I am sure I shall never be able to understand a word that Mademoiselle says!"

"I don't believe she speaks any words," said Gertrude March. "It is nothing but making noises in her nose and throat."

"And she pronounces it so differently from mamma," said Lily. "She always called this word *moi-mwor*, but Mademoiselle says *mwar;* and then the definite article, mamma always called it *ler*, but Mademoiselle calls it something like *lu*."

"I could only write three words of the dictation," said Nannie, "and those were *avez-vous* and *toujours*. How many did you write?"

"I did not write any," replied Gertrude March, "for I don't mean to learn French at

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all. It is a great shame to make English people learn such a ridiculous language. Jack says the proper thing would be for the English to conquer France, and make all the French speak English."

"But I mean to try," said Nannie, "for I know mamma would like us to speak French nicely; and papa said that perhaps some day, when we were grown up, he would take us to Paris."

"I don't intend ever to go to France," said Gertrude; "but when I am old enough, I shall go out to India to papa."

"Shall you?" exclaimed Nannie; "what, all across the sea? What a long way!"

"Oh!" answered Gertrude, "it is nothing at all. It was such fun, you can't think, coming over."

"Have you been there already, then?" inquired Lily.

"Of course," replied Gertrude; "why, I was born there. I came to England when I was six years old, and now I am eleven. Jack came over when he was eight, and now he is sixteen; but he has been one voyage since in a man-of-

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war. He is a midshipman now; but he is going some day to be an admiral."

"Does your brother Jack think Miss Cotton and Miss Steele pretty?" inquired Nannie.

"What, carrots and turnips?" exclaimed Gertrude. "Do you mean those two great girls that sit in grand-mamma's pew?"

"Yes," replied Lily.

"I should think not, indeed," said Gertrude, indignantly. "Why he cannot bear them to sit in the pew, they look so silly and ridiculous, and he always calls them 'carrots and turnips,' for one is just like a great round white turnip, with her full face and hair turned off; and the other with the pointed nose and red curls is exactly like a carrot. But what made you ask such a thing?"

"Because Annie Shepherd said that they thought so," replied Nannie.

"Then I shall just inform them of their mistake," said Gertrude, looking round the room; but they were nowhere to be seen, having gone with most of the other young ladies to dress for dinner.

Very soon after the bell rang, and the whole

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party assembled in the dining-room. They were scarcely seated, when Gertrude, who was sitting with Lily and Nannie at the bottom of the table, leaned forward, and addressing Miss Cotton and Miss Steele, who, being nearly the eldest, had their places next to Mrs. Stafford, at the top, said, "You never made a greater mistake in all your lives, Miss Steele and Miss Cotton, than to suppose that my brother Jack thinks either of you pretty; on the contrary, he considers you two ridiculous conceited girls, and he always calls you Carrots and Turnips."

It is impossible to describe the effect of this remark. Had an explosion of gunpowder taken place in the midst of the little party it could scarcely have produced a greater sensation than Gertrude's plain speech. For a moment or two there was perfect silence, then no one, not even Mrs. Stafford and the teachers, could resist the prolonged and hearty laugh which followed, excepting the two unfortunate victims, who, bursting into tears, rushed out of the room and up-stairs to their own apartment, where, slamming the door, they concealed their infinite mortification for several hours.

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It was some time before order was restored at the table, and it was not until after the dinner was over, and the servants had left the room, that Mrs. Stafford said—"I observed that you were all very ready, just now, to join in the hearty laugh which followed Gertrude March's remark. Having perceived so quickly the absurdity of such conduct in your companions, it is scarcely necessary perhaps to caution you, lest at any time you make yourselves equally ridiculous in the sight of others; but one thing I wish to observe, and that is this, although ridicule may sometimes be the best cure for folly, yet we should never forget how others feel when suffering from it. I think if Gertrude had reflected for a moment upon the pain she was about to inflict, she would have avoided this public exposure of the foolishness of her companions. It is most right to be sincere and faithful in all our dealings with others, but let us never at any time forget the tenderness and love with which we like to be treated ourselves."

After dinner they all took a pleasant walk into the country, where the indications of the

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advancing season, in the bursting of the long-promising buds into the fulfilment of bright green leaves, awakened a spring of joy in almost every young heart.

"Summer is really coming now," said Annie Shepherd, "and then the holidays will arrive, and we shall go home once more."

"How pleasant that will be," said Nannie. "No doubt papa will come and fetch us, and mamma will go to Paddington. How we shall spring out of the carriage when we see her standing on the platform! And then Alfred and Herbert will be at home too."

"I do not wish for the holidays yet," observed Gertrude March, "for Jack will be gone away, and besides, I have not had time yet to see what all of you are like, and to find out what sort of a place school is. Jack said I should no longer be able to do as I chose; but they shan't manage me here any more than at home, I am quite determined. I mean to do as I like, and to say what I like. If people are absurd, I shall just tell them so. I am a plucky girl, as Jack says, and I don't ever intend to be a polite young lady. I wonder if there is a fine

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MADEMOISELLE PLANCHE BRINGS THE LITTLE CULPRIT DOWN.
[*Page* 59.

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view the other side of that bank?" and so saying she sprang up the steep ascent, and, to the terror and astonishment of Miss Jackson and Mademoiselle Planché, stood on the top, her hat blown back, and her dress fluttering in the breeze, exclaiming, "Come up, come up, every one of you! there's the most glorious view of the city and the hills around! Get up, you mean creatures, and see it. Oh, it's beautiful!" In vain did Miss Jackson and Mademoiselle Planché command and threaten, and then even beg and entreat, Gertrude listened to neither, but danced upon the top of the bank in ecstasies of delight, crying, "Why don't you come? How can you stand grovelling there below? I will help you all up, if you give me your hands."

At this moment a party of ladies appeared coming down the road, and Mademoiselle, taking a little run, reached the top of the bank, and putting her arms round Gertrude's waist, descended with her safely to the ground.

It may be supposed that the young lady was in somewhat of a passion at this proceeding, but Mademoiselle and Miss Jackson, taking

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her between them, compelled the little culprit to march home, utterly regardless themselves of the torrent of invectives which she poured forth upon them.

Of course Mrs. Stafford was informed of this misconduct on their arrival at home; but the teachers having gained their point, and thinking that it was a great object with Gertrude to make herself notorious in some way, Mrs. Stafford wisely considered that it was better to pass over the occurrence as not worth regarding.

Miss Cotton and Miss Steele appeared in the school-room during the afternoon, but they evidently had not recovered from their mortification, and their few remarks, either to teachers or companions, exhibited exceeding irritability and sullenness.

Not so Gertrude, her storm was over, and she was full of sunshine for all, especially was she attentive and amiable towards Miss Jackson and Mademoiselle Planché. In vain did they assume a dignified look of displeasure, she would not see it, but persisted in maintaining an appearance of perfect satisfaction with herself and everyone around her.

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She produced her penknife for Miss Steele's use; fetched Miss Cotton's French grammar almost before that young lady had discovered that she had come to the table without it; and sprang up to shut the door, which some one had left open on entering, declaring that Mademoiselle would surely take cold.

She wished to produce astonishment, and of course this behaviour was far more likely to effect her desire than if she had spent the afternoon in sulky displeasure at her defeat.

To appear as if nothing had happened, was sufficiently remarkable for the school-room, where all were aware of her extraordinary conduct during the walk, but when she went down to the dining-room to take her drawing lesson, it was necessary to look something more than unconcerned, for perhaps the teachers had now informed Mrs. Stafford of her misconduct. She, therefore, entered the room with an independent defiant air; looking up into Mrs. Stafford's face with an expression that seemed to say—"Now for the scolding! say what you choose, I don't care!" Mrs. Stafford, however, said nothing at all;

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and, somewhat to Gertrude's disappointment, appeared perfectly unconscious of her presence. Once she even ventured the remark, "Oh! it was so beautiful upon that bank, the wind was blowing so freshly around; and the view so glorious."

"Gertrude, my dear, your pencil requires cutting," said Mrs. Stafford, "that outline is too heavy."

"Did you ever see the view of Bath from the top of that bank, Mrs. Stafford?" asked Gertrude, presently.

"I have often seen the same view from the Terrace above, my dear, and I agree with you that it is remarkably fine," was Mrs. Stafford's reply.

Gertrude looked disconcerted, "She does know about it," thought she to herself, "or how should she tell what bank I meant?"

The wonder of this exploit then was at an end; and instead of hearing of it continually until it had been eclipsed by another, as had been the case when she lived with her grandmamma, it appeared to be regarded as unworthy of notoriety; merely a little child's freak, for-

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gotten the next moment. It was evidently a difficult matter to shock or surprise Mrs. Stafford; "But we shall see," said Gertrude to herself.

The rest of the day passed quietly with its usual routine of duties.

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CHAPTER V.

THE POSTMAN'S KNOCK.

AMONGST a multitude of letters, great and small, important and trivial, the postman did not neglect to deliver two one morning at Mrs. Stafford's house, directed to the Misses Warrington. Mamma's pretty hand of course demanded attention before Alfred's large round letters, filling the whole of the envelope. Lily and Nannie had both written home on the Wednesday after their arrival, and Lily had taken the opportunity to "beg mamma to ask papa not to keep an inn, as the young ladies did not like it."

Mamma's letter was as follows:—

MY DEAR LITTLE GIRLS,—It seems a long time to have been without you, although it is really scarcely more than a week since you bade good-bye to your little nest, but we miss you so much. Your letters were a great comfort; and it pleased dear papa and me very much to find that, though you felt your separation from us so deeply, you were yet trying to be as good and patient as you could, and, by God's help, to do your duty simply and faithfully.

I am very sorry that you should have had more to vex you than was needful, in your new home; but as it is, I

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suppose you will be relieved to hear that papa does not keep an inn, but is a barrister. I cannot help feeling on one account a little glad that this mistake should have arisen, and that is, that I should think your feelings under the treatment you have received from some of your school-fellows will teach you never to be unkind or rude to any one on the ground of her station or occupation, and to be careful to judge others by their own merits, rather than by their position in society or riches. Please to give my kind regards to Miss More, and let her know how highly papa and I appreciate her conduct towards you in this matter. I do not understand how this blunder arose; but suppose you happened to speak of papa as having to do with Gray's Inn, or as being at the bar. In order that you may not be so ignorant for the future, papa wishes me to tell you that Gray's Inn is one of the Inns of Court, as they are called, that is, houses where gentlemen study for the profession of a barrister. They are called inns, because many years ago gentlemen's mansions were thus designated in the same way that they are still called in French—*hôtels*. Gray's Inn was a house formerly belonging to the Lords Gray, of Wilton. To turn to other things, I must not forget to tell you that I heard from Aunt Sarah yesterday, and she tells me that she intends paying you a visit this week.

We shall quite hope to hear from you again, my dear children, next Thursday, and to find that you are happier than when you last wrote. Papa desires his best love to you, and be assured also of the constant affection of

Your loving mother,

MARY WARRINGTON.

"There, papa is not an innkeeper after all,"

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exclaimed Lily, as soon as they had finished reading mamma's letter. "I must run directly and tell all the young ladies; but stop, what is it that mamma says he really is?"

"A barrister," said Nannie, looking into the letter; "but won't you read Alf's letter before you go, Lily?"

"Well, I suppose it is a short one," replied Lily, opening it, and reading it aloud:—

MY DEAR GIRLS,—Of course by this time you are at school, so I shall direct this to you there. I am glad you are gone, for I think it will do you good. How do you like it? Do you have any fun? I can't think what a lot of girls can do when they are out of school. Is there a play-ground? What is Nelly More like? Please to let me know, because Dick has promised that I shall marry her, if I like, when I am grown up; but I am almost afraid she is too old to suit me, so that I don't much think I shall do it; but you may as well tell me when you write, if she is pretty and good-natured, and how tall she is. Dick wants to marry Lily; but I have not quite made up my mind yet whether he shall or not.

Herbert is so lazy he won't write; but he sends his best love and best wishes. I wish boys and girls went to school together, you would be so jolly here, and I could take care of you; but the holidays will soon come.

I remain, my dear sisters, With much love,
Your affectionate brother,
ALFRED H. WARRINGTON.

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As soon as this letter was read, the little girls went into the school-room, and meeting Nelly More at the door they communicated to her the intelligence that papa was a barrister, and that perhaps Alfred might marry her when he was a man, at which idea she laughed very heartily.

She then went to take her seat in the first class, followed by the little girls, who wished to show her the message in mamma's letter. As they leaned over the table, one on each side of her, Miss Steele remarked in a loud whisper to Miss Cotton, that she did not consider their table a fit place for innkeepers' children, and people of that sort.

"What do you mean by innkeepers' children?" said Nelly More; "where are they?"

"I am sure you ought to know better than anyone else, Miss More," replied Miss Cotton, "since seemingly you've got a 'pangshong' for such."

"I?" said Nelly More. "I do not know that I have the pleasure of any such acquaintance. Let me see, your father, Miss Cotton, we all know well enough is an independent gentleman;

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Mr. Steele, I believe, is a surgeon; the father of Miss Manners is—I forget what, exactly—something wholesale, I know, certainly not an innkeeper; and I conclude the Reverend Richard Vincent does not keep an inn. The only other individuals that I can see at the table at this moment are the Misses Warrington, and their papa is a barrister."

"A barrister!" exclaimed Miss Steele, "why, they told us themselves he had an hotel in London."

"It is the 'Gray Boar,' or something," said Miss Vincent.

"Some people, I believe, were ignorant enough to mistake Gray's Inn, which is one of the Inns of Court, for an hotel, and to be unaware that the expression, 'at the bar,' signifies the profession of a barrister," said Nelly More.

"Is that really true?" asked Miss Steele.

"Yes," said Lily; "really and truly papa is a barrister; I can show it to you in mamma's letter."

"Then I'm sure I am most sorry, Miss Warrington," said Miss Steele, "that we should

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have made this mistake, and I hope you will excuse it, and that we shall be friends."

"But we are just the same as we were before," said Nannie; "and if you did not like us then, I do not see why you should now."

"Ah!" replied Miss Cotton, "but it makes all the difference, only you are so young you don't understand these things, my dear; to be sure, as Miss Steele says, I am sorry for what's past, but I hope you will let byegones be byegones; and if you will each accept a slice of my cake after school, you are as welcome to it as anything."

Mrs. Stafford here entered the school-room, and the morning lessons were commenced. After school, as Miss Steele was following her usual occupation, when there was no one by to prevent it, of peering through the blinds, and watching the passers-by, she exclaimed, "There's a gentleman's carriage coming down the street. And now it has stopped at this door. Whose can it be? Can any of you imagine?"

Lily and Nannie rushed to the window

"It is grandpapa's carriage, and that is his old coachman Thomas!" exclaimed Lily.

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"It is Aunt Sarah," said Nannie. "There she is, just getting out. Oh! how nice. Are you not glad, Lily? Mamma said she was coming this week."

"What a queer old guy of a coachman," said Gertrude March, who had now joined the party at the window. "Why he looks only fit to drive a mourning coach at a funeral. And the idea of driving in a close carriage this beautiful day. Oh! if I had only a chaise and a pair of spirited little ponies, wouldn't I dash along!"

"I think Aunt Sarah is going to have a pony-carriage," said Lily; "and I do not think grandpapa would keep Thomas if it were not that he had lived with him so long."

"Not keep Thomas?" exclaimed Nannie. "Why, Lily, I am sure grandpapa could not bear to be without him."

"The Miss Warringtons are wanted, if you please," said a servant, entering the room.

The little girls ran to the drawing-room, and there was, indeed, Aunt Sarah.

After a considerable amount of kissing and hugging, Aunt Sarah had to be told the whole history of the events which had transpired since

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she saw them last; and of course the blunder about papa's keeping an inn was not forgotten, nor the surprising behaviour of Gertrude March, nor the story of carrots and turnips; and as the two little girls ran on, both talking eagerly and at once, it was rather difficult for Aunt Sarah to comprehend whether it was papa who had danced upon the top of a high bank, and defied Mademoiselle and Miss Jackson, or whether Lady March kept an inn in London called "Carrots and Turnips." She was ready, however, to listen to it all, and to give her ready sympathy for all the vexations, and her hearty enjoyment of all the amusement.

And then Aunt Sarah had her stories to tell, of how grandpapa had been out shooting, and had sent a hare and three partridges to Mrs. Stafford; of how Rough had seemed to understand perfectly well when she told him she was going to see Lily and Nannie, and had been obliged to be shut up in order to prevent his following the carriage. And then grandmamma had sent them a little box filled with all manner of pieces of silk and ribbon of the most beautiful colours and patterns, together with a

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quantity of beads and sewing silks, of which they were to make any use which they pleased. Betsey also had made them one of her best and largest cakes, which Thomas had carefully packed in a hamper, together with a contribution of the last of the store of winter apples, which he looked upon as his own peculiar gift, and an effort of self-sacrifice upon his part, as he always insisted upon making the fruit last until May.

Mrs. Stafford finally proposed sending dinner to them in her little parlour, and at the urgent entreaties of the little girls, Aunt Sarah consented to this arrangement, and thus they were enabled to spend several hours together of undisturbed enjoyment. After dinner, Aunt Sarah unfolded to them a scheme which grandpapa had proposed, and that was nothing less than a plan to convey the whole school, Mrs. Stafford, teachers and all, over to Ethelston House, to spend the afternoon and evening. The carriage would fetch Mrs. Stafford and three or four besides, while a large covered waggon was to be provided for the accommodation of the rest.

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"Oh! what fun," exclaimed the children; "but when, Aunt Sarah? How soon? Do let it be next week."

"No," replied Aunt Sarah, "grandmamma thought that it would be better to wait until next month, when the evenings will be longer, and the weather warm enough, perhaps, to drink tea in the garden. By that time, too, the flowers will be all in bloom, and the garden quite gay; indeed, if we wait till the end of the month, the grass may be cut in the home mead, and we can then have a haymaking party."

"We have never seen haymaking," said Nannie. "Don't you do it with a knife and fork?"

"Oh! you little cockney," laughed Aunt Sarah. "I suppose you think its like eating French beans."

"I do not know," replied Nannie, "but I thought I had heard of people having hay-forks."

"And asparagus-forks," said Aunt Sarah. "Well, I will teach you how to make hay, if you will wait till the end of next month. If

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this weather lasts I should think the grass would be ready by that time."

"Oh, how delightful that will be!" exclaimed both the children, clapping their hands. "But you do not think Mrs. Stafford will object, do you, Aunt Sarah?"

"I will try and arrange it with her before I leave," answered Aunt Sarah.

So it was proposed to Mrs. Stafford, who gave her ready acceptance to the invitation, but preferred its being deferred until the end of May, when the evenings would be long and the weather warm.

At five o'clock the carriage came for Aunt Sarah, and amid tears and kisses she took her departure.

After she was gone, both the little girls could not help a very uncomfortable feeling, as if they found themselves suddenly left in the dark by the withdrawal of a cheerful light, and it was with aching hearts that they returned to the school-room, where they found that the afternoon lessons were over, and the girls sitting together enjoying the little idle time which ensued before the tea-bell rang.

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The pleasant project for next month was quickly communicated to their companions, and was received by them with even more enthusiasm and delight than they had anticipated. In fact, they had scarcely been sufficiently accustomed to the monotony of school-life to know how refreshing was such an interruption of the usual routine. The teachers even, especially Mademoiselle, seemed to be quite cheered and excited by the prospect, and Lily and Nannie soon found that, instead of the scorn and neglect which they had received as "inn-keepers' children," they were likely to be treated with even too much attention and regard, as the grandchildren of Mr. Locke of Ethelston House, in whose power it was to confer such delightful pleasures.

Before they went to sleep that night, Lily said, "I am very glad that Grandpapa Locke is our grandpapa; but I never knew before that he was in any way remarkable, for mamma never told us so, neither did Aunt Sarah, and I do not believe that he knows it himself even; but the young ladies know it, and that is the reason they are so much more

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kind to us, and it certainly is a great deal pleasanter."

"Did I not say," said Nannie, "that God would make the young ladies like us, if we asked Him, and you see, Lily, He has done it."

It was a few days after this that the postman again knocked at Mrs. Stafford's door, bringing another letter for the Misses Warrington. It was given to Lily in the school-room, and she had scarcely opened it and glanced down the page when Nannie entered.

"Oh, Nannie!" exclaimed she, "the most extraordinary wonderful thing has happened. What do you think it is? But you would never guess if you were to try for a hundred years. Just come here." And together they read the following:—

MY DEAR LITTLE PETS,—I am going to communicate to you a piece of intelligence, which I think may surprise, but I am certain will please you. God has been so good as to give mamma and me a little baby boy, and, of course to you a little brother. I am sure you are both wishing you could only see him and nurse him; but mamma, I have no doubt, will write in a few days and tell you all about him. For my part I have only seen him for a minute, and then the principal thing I observed was, that he had a very red, round face,

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and a very white, stiff cap border; he had a large piece of flannel wrapped round him, which prevented my making any further observations. I think his name is to be Willy, after mamma's little brother, of whom Mrs. Willet told you last Christmas. I can fancy how busy you two will be, when the holidays come, over this little gentleman. What a happy time that will be!

I must not write more now, for it is past midnight, and I have yet to inform grandmamma and the boys of the arrival of this wonderful little being. God bless and keep you, my dear little girls. Ever with much love,

Your affectionate father,

JAMES WARRINGTON.

"Oh, the little darling!" exclaimed Lily. "Don't you long to see him, Nannie?"

"Yes, indeed," replied Nannie, "I wish mamma would bring him here for us to see."

"And how nice it will be to nurse him, and put on his things to go out, like the dollies, only a real live baby, and our brother, too; that is far better than the most beautiful and largest doll that ever was seen," said Lily.

"I shall not care a bit for my doll any more," said Nannie; "nor even for its bassinet, that I had last Christmas out of the gipsy's kettle. I wonder if mamma has got a bassinet for the little darling?"

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"Oh, no doubt she will have one," replied Lily. "Cannot you fancy it, with its little curtains lined with pink, and fastened back with large pink rosettes, and then the baby's pretty, dear little face on the pillow inside?"

"Let us go and tell Miss More," said Nannie. "I do not believe she has such a thing as a baby brother, nor do I think any of the girls in the school have such a treasure. Oh! wasn't it kind of God to send him to papa and mamma instead of to anybody else?"

"And mamma is so fond of babies, and knows so well how to take care of them," said Lily, "that I am sure it will get on so nicely, and be such a beauty."

"How curious it will seem to have a brother younger than me!" remarked Nannie. "I wonder if he will be like Alf and Hib when he grows bigger! Should you not like him to be like our little uncle Willy?"

"I do not know exactly," replied Lily. "I should not wish him to hurt his back, and not be able to run about."

"No, of course not," said Nannie. "But I

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should like him to be so good, and quiet, and loving."

"I like Alf and Hib very much just as they are," answered Lily. "And you know, Nannie, if they do tease sometimes, it's much more fun than it would be if they were quiet, good little boys. I know grandmamma and papa said something about that last Christmas, but I forget exactly what it was they said, now. I think it was, that they thought that God had made little Willy like that because He knew that he was going to die very soon, but that He made other boys good in a different way, when they were going to live a long time, and have a great many temptations."

A little disappointment ensued on the communication of the wonderful intelligence to the other girls, from the fact being brought to light that our little heroines were by no means so distinguished by the possession of a baby brother as they had imagined. This, however, was soon mitigated by the ready sympathy and willingness to talk it over on the part of those who were gifted like themselves with such a treasure.

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CHAPTER VI.

THE SECRET.

AMONG so small a number even as sixteen girls, it can scarcely fail to happen that the standard of right and wrong set before them in their several homes has been very different, and, but by God's help, there is great danger that in time the lowest of these may be the most generally adopted. In one respect Lily and Nannie had the advantage over nearly all the young ladies under Mrs. Stafford's care, and that was, that they had been trained, not only to perfect truthfulness, but to the most unreserved openness and frankness. They had never been accustomed to conceal a thought, a word, or an action from papa and mamma, and although they had never felt as though there were the least attempt upon the part of their parents to pry into their little talks or plans, yet so fully did they enter into all the feelings, ideas, and amusements of their little

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girls, that it seemed only natural to them that papa and mamma should know everything. Had there been any attempt on the part of the parents that seemed like a suspicious interference, or had the children's ready communications been received with indifference or reproof, reserve and concealment would immediately have arisen; but never having anything to hide, the *sin* of secret plots and reservations had never been strongly brought before them.

And a sin it is, a dark cloud dimming the simplicity and purity of the heart, hanging like a dull, heavy weight upon the spirits, putting an end to peace of mind, to the sweet enjoyment of life, and to the clear upward look towards God our Father, through Jesus Christ. Whatever you do, my young readers, be careful never to engage in the concealment of a secret.

Some weeks had passed away since Aunt Sarah's visit and the reception of papa's letter, and the month of May had now fairly commenced, when one day Lily entered the house carrying in her hand a little bunch of flowers, gathered from the piece of ground Mrs. Stafford

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allowed them to call their own, intending to present the bouquet to Miss More.

She could not find Nelly in the school-room, and it being the hour when the young ladies dressed for dinner, she looked for her in her own room, but she was not there. She was returning to the school-room when she met one of the servants, who, in answer to her inquiries, said that she had seen Miss More go up-stairs to the rooms above, and that she thought she was in Miss Cotton and Miss Steele's room. Lily, therefore, immediately ran up-stairs, and, opening the door, perceived Miss More, Miss Cotton, Miss Steele, Miss Vincent, and Miss Manners, all leaning together over the dressing-table, evidently deeply engrossed over something.

The tears were running down Miss Cotton's fat, white face, and while she hurriedly wiped them away, Miss Steele exclaimed, "What do you want in our room, Miss Warrington? You have no business here."

"I have been looking for Miss More," replied Lily, "and Ann told me she was up here. I wanted to give her these flowers;" and as she

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THE SECRET READING. [*Page* 83.

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said this, she went up to Miss More and offered her the flowers.

Miss More turned round from the dressing-table to take the nosegay, and in doing this her elbow touched a book lying open upon the table, and which immediately fell to the ground. Lily instantly picked it up, and in doing so looked at the title, exclaiming, "'The Heir of Redclyffe!' Oh, isn't that a very pretty book? Mamma and Aunt Sarah read it, and they said we might, when we were a little older."

"It is *so* interesting," said Miss Cotton. "I wish you had not interrupted us, for we were just reading about Guy's death, and it is so very affecting."

"I wish you would let me read it," said Lily. "I do not think mamma would have any objection; but at any rate I can ask Mrs. Stafford."

The girls looked at one another for a moment, and then Miss Vincent said, "I do not believe your mamma could object to your reading it, my dear, for my papa gave it to me himself, and he is a clergyman; and I do assure you I wouldn't read it for a moment if there were any harm in the book, no more would Miss More,

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I am quite certain; but Mrs. Stafford never allows us to read any books, but those she chooses, in the evening, and she would be very angry if she knew we had this one; but if you will promise most faithfully never to tell a single person, I will lend the book to you, and you can come up here and read it when you like."

"Would not Mrs. Stafford read it in the evening, if you were to ask her?" inquired Lily.

"Certainly not," replied Miss Steele. "Haven't you perceived that she never reads anything but what she calls instructive books? that is biographies and travels. Oh! I am so sick of them."

"And she has strictly prohibited us from bringing any novels into the house," said Miss Manners. "Last half I brought back 'The Experience of Life,' which mamma says is a very nice book; but she took it away directly she saw me reading it."

"I read nothing but novels all the holidays," said Miss Cotton, "to make up for it; but now, Miss Warrington, you must promise before you leave this room that you won't betray us."

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"I do not like to promise," replied Lily; "but very likely Mrs. Stafford will never say anything about it, and then, of course, I shall not tell her."

"That will not do," said Miss Steele. "You must promise most solemnly that, whether you are asked about it or not, you will never reveal to a single person that the 'Heir of Redclyffe' is in the house, or that you know to whom it belongs, or who has read it."

"I will promise most faithfully never to say a word unless she asks me," answered Lily.

"That is a very mean, shabby way of getting out of it," said Miss Manners. "Of course you mean to read it yourself, and then you will have to tell also that you were persuaded to do it by us."

"I do not think I shall read it myself," replied Lily, "as Mrs. Stafford has forbidden it."

"But surely, my dear," said Miss More, "you would not get us all into trouble, if you could help it."

"It is most treacherous," said Miss Vincent, "to come prying and listening into our rooms, and then report to Mrs. Stafford what goes on."

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"I'll tell you what," said Miss Cotton, "you are a disagreeable, mean-spirited, blabbing little thing!"

Lily could not stand all this, so presently she said—"Well, I will promise faithfully never to tell anything at all about it, but I shall not read the book myself." And with this she left the room.

The day passed in its usual manner, but somehow it seemed very different to Lily. A kind of cloud appeared to hang over everything. She felt that she avoided Mrs. Stafford's eye; she was cross with Nannie; and though, when school was over, she laughed and talked loudly and merrily with Gertrude March, yet there was a sort of aching in her heart that she had never felt before. Something within her seemed to say that she had done wrong, and not all the excuses which she made to herself, such as there being no real harm in reading the book, could restore her peace of mind. "I have committed no act of disobedience myself," thought she, "and nothing shall persuade me to read that story while I am here." At night, when she lay down to rest, she was still more un-

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happy. She felt that she could not look up to God with the same child-like confidence and trust, imploring pardon through Jesus Christ for the sins of the day, and protection through the night. And when she thought of home, and papa and mamma, she felt as though something had thrown a shadow over the pleasant remembrances and anticipations in the midst of which she usually fell asleep. It was quite true that mamma would not think there was any harm in her reading the book, but she was also quite sure that she would be grieved at her doing so in opposition to the wishes of Mrs. Stafford, and as a secret, concealed thing. That, most certainly, mamma would particularly dislike. And how could she tell but that Mrs. Stafford had some good reasons for making it a rule that no tales should be introduced into the house but those which she read to them?

The grey summer dawn was already making its way into the room, and gradually revealing one object after another, before she thoroughly fell asleep. As she had restlessly tossed about through the long hours of the night, turning all these things over and over in her mind, she

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could not help envying the quiet repose of her sister. "If Nannie had only happened to have taken the flowers up to Miss More instead of me," thought she to herself, "I daresay she would have got into this trouble, and I should have been free from it." But she did not remember the prayer—"Lead us not into temptation; deliver us from evil."

The next morning, after school, Miss Vincent came to Lily, and said—"Now, my dear, we are going to dress. If you will come to our room, you shall read 'The Heir of Redclyffe.' I will give you the first volume, while we go on with the second."

"I do not intend to read it at school," replied Lily. "I would rather wait for the holidays, thank you."

"Oh, you may just as well read it now," said Miss Vincent; "you may not be able to get it at home, and as you know all about it, you will not be able to get out of the scrape in that way, if it should be at any time found out."

"It is not because I am afraid," replied Lily, "but as Mrs. Stafford does not allow it, I think I would rather not read it here."

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"I dare say," said Miss Steele, who had just come up. "A highly virtuous young lady! Why, if people make ridiculous rules, we enter into the absurdity by keeping them. I am ready enough to conform to all that is right and proper, but this is just a piece of tyranny on the part of Mrs. Stafford, without any reason in it. Why, did she not say herself the other day, that the reason the Italians were so uncivilised and debased, was because the Pope would not let them read what they liked?"

"Come along, Miss Warrington; we want no traitors in the camp," said Miss Cotton.

"I should think, as your mamma herself told you you might read the 'Heir of Redclyffe' when you were a little older, she could not object to your doing so now," urged Miss More.

"Well," replied Lily, "I do not wish you to think that I refuse in order that when anything is known I may be able to say that I have not read it; so I will come up-stairs and hear you read it, but I shall not begin it to myself."

So Lily went up-stairs with them, and listened eagerly to what was read; but in reply

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to her questions, "Who was Amy?" "What had Philip done to Guy?" the only answers she received were, "Read and you will know. Find out for yourself;" and before the end of the week she had informed herself upon all these points, by reading the whole of the earlier portion of the story to herself.

It would not be true to say that she did not enjoy it, for there was something at the time most exciting and fascinating in this secret and stealthy perusal; but the consciousness of concealment, the fear of betrayal, and the sense of wrong, soon obliterated all the pleasure she derived, and wholly prevented her from appreciating, or even apprehending, the many beautiful lessons taught by that most touching and delightful tale.

In the meantime her lessons and other duties were ill performed, and both Mademoiselle and Miss Jackson made frequent complaints of her inattention and idleness. Mrs. Stafford observed her closely, and fancied there was something wrong, but could not at that time detect what it could be.

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CHAPTER VII.

THE HAYMAKERS.

"YOUR Aunt Sarah desires her kind love to you both, my dears," said Mrs. Stafford one morning, folding up a letter which she had received at the breakfast-table, and looking as she did so across towards Lily and Nannie. They both coloured up very red, and began drinking their coffee, in order to conceal the uncontrollable delight and significance with which they received this message, for they felt convinced that the letter must contain the promised and much anticipated invitation to spend the afternoon at Ethelston House.

It was now the last week in May, and the weather had been for some days remarkably warm and settled, and the promised treat had often been the subject of conversation among the girls; so that when Mrs. Stafford began: "I have a great pleasure in store for you all," they knew quite well what was coming.

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The day proposed was Wednesday, the third of June, and it was now Saturday, so that there were only three clear days to drag through, before the auspicious morning should arrive.

Mr. Locke's carriage was to come for Mrs. Stafford, and any others that she might choose to accompany her, while a large spring waggon was to be provided for the accommodation of the rest. They were to take the rail to Chippenham, where the conveyances were to meet them at the station at half-past one o'clock.

The grass was to be cut on Monday, Aunt Sarah said, and should the weather continue fine, would be just in a fit state to be tossed about by a merry party on Wednesday.

Of course the expressions of joy at this announcement were confined to intense smiling and whispered expressions of delight, while in Mrs. Stafford's presence; but when the party was dismissed into the school-room, where the morning sun was shining brightly, and the soft summer air blowing through the open windows, their excitement found vent in a variety of demonstrations, according to age and dignity, consisting of talking, laughing, jumping, and

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dancing, while Gertrude March relieved her feelings by several unsuccessful attempts to walk along the summit of a high desk without sliding down on either side.

It was with difficulty, even when the teachers entered, that the usual order was restored.

How anxiously were all the sunsets watched which intervened between Saturday and Wednesday morning, to see if they were of the auspicious rosy hue, said to delight the shepherd; and with what trembling fingers were the blinds drawn aside, even before his beams arose above the horizon, to discover the promise of a fine day. On Tuesday a considerable breeze arose, that some foreboding souls declared to be "blowing up for rain;" but the rain refused to be blown up, and the breeze, finding the folly of his attempts, thought better of it, and retired with the sun. How pleasant it was then to watch the rising of the gentle dew, refreshing the heated earth with copious vapour, and promising, in softest whisper, a bright, golden morrow; and the quiet stars came out in the clear sky, bidding anxious little hearts lie down to sleep in peace, while they kept

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watch for the return of the great sun in the heavens in all his glory.

The morning was fair and cloudless when Lily peeped through the blinds soon after four o'clock; and a later inspection of the sky, which took place when they all rose at half-past six, was equally satisfactory. It was hard work to settle down to the usual routine of lessons; but Mrs. Stafford dismissed the classes an hour earlier, and, after a hasty dinner, the happy party rushed up-stairs to dress.

"What shall you wear, Miss Manners?" inquired Miss Cotton.

"I do not exactly know," replied Miss Manners, who did not wish to make her intentions known beforehand, preferring, as she often did, to come out in a style different from all the rest.

"I shall wear my dark blue miry watered silk, my green grenadier shawl, and my new satiny pie bonnet, with the roses inside," announced Miss Eliza Jane Cotton.

"The idea of dressing like that to ride in a waggon!" cried Gertrude March. "Oh, I would give anything to have an upset. Fancy Miss

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Cotton and the green grenadier tumbling into the midst of a miry watered lane! I should make a point myself of coming plump down upon the satiny pie. What fun it would be! And imagine the figure she would present at Ethelston House, with a green grenadier covered with mud, and a squashed satiny pie upon her head?"

"What is all this noise about a pie?" inquired Miss Jackson, coming up-stairs at that moment.

"Why," replied Gertrude, "I believe Miss Cotton wishes to obtain Mrs. Stafford's permission to be accompanied by a green grenadier, and she also proposes taking a pie with her; I suppose for their mutual sustenance upon the way."

"Silence, Miss March," said Miss Jackson. "Let us have none of this nonsense."

"The fact is simply this," said Nelly More, "Miss Cotton has expressed her intention of wearing a *moiré* silk dress, a green grenadine shawl, and a bonnet of *paillé satinée*."

"I have just come with a message from Mrs. Stafford," said Miss Jackson, "to say that you

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will all wear plain muslin dresses, light cloth jackets or cloaks, and hats; and you must be ready to start in twenty minutes."

"Hurrah!" shouted Gertrude. "Hurrah for pork pies, and mushrooms, and for everything else in which you can dance and tumble about just as you like, without a fear of being spoilt. Mrs. Stafford is a brick, and no mistake."

"You will certainly get into trouble before the day is over, Miss March," said Miss Jackson, "if you allow your spirits to run away with you in this manner."

"If my spirits run away with me, it will be a good riddance for you, Miss Jackson, but I won't plague you, I'll promise. I won't spoil your pleasure by giving you the trouble to be looking after me continually, so don't worry yourself, but be happy and merry, like a girl, and forget you are a teacher, for this day at least," and so saying, Gertrude danced off to dress.

In less than twenty minutes most of the merry group had assembled in the hall, waiting impatiently for the rest, and full of anxious fears lest they should be too late at the station.

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Mrs. Stafford had engaged two compartments of the railway carriage for her party, into which they crowded, and when the whistle sounded, it seemed, indeed, as if the promised pleasure had really come at last.

Lily and Nannie looked out of the window as they approached Chippenham, eager to catch the first sight of Thomas.

There he was, looking as red and radiant as a hunters' moon; and taking off his hat as he caught sight of the little girls at the window, he hurried up, exclaiming—

"If these bean't the young ladies, I should like to know who they could be, only answer me that; and I'll make so bold as to say—Welcome to Ethelston, leastways if we was there."

"Oh! Thomas," exclaimed Lily, "have you got the waggon? Aunt Sarah said we were to go in a waggon."

"Yes, Miss," replied Thomas, as he handed the young ladies out of the carriage, "and we've put some bags in it, and there's four hosses, which is comfortable to sit upon, and won't think much of the bit of road, which they're

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main rutty for summer weather, to be sure; but there, it's all along o' master going and selling the sociable, as I've said to him this day, and shall say it again, if so be as I am spared, times and times."

"Are we to sit upon the horses?" exclaimed Gertrude March. "Oh! what fun."

"I wouldn't, not if I was you, Miss," replied Thomas. "You'll be better off inside in this sun; not but what you'd sit a horse better nor most, miss, I'd be bound, but there, that's neither here nor there."

"I am so glad you think so, Thomas," said Gertrude, "because, do you know, it is the greatest ambition of my life to have a pony. Is there a pony at Ethelston House?"

"Yes," answered Thomas; "there's Miss Sarah's."

"Then I'll mount him this very afternoon, Thomas," said Gertrude; "you put the saddle and bridle upon him. I am certain I can manage him, if I am only once upon his back. I only hope he will be frisky. I didn't expect such fun as that."

By this time the party had reached the car-

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riage and the waggon, which were standing beneath the shade of some trees upon the road. Mrs. Stafford, and three of the elder girls occupied the carriage, while the younger and merrier of the party took their seats upon some sacks stuffed with straw in the waggon.

Talk of the luxury of rolling along a smooth street in a softly cushioned carriage, it is nothing compared to the sweet content of drawling drowsily along a country road, on a golden afternoon, in June, reclining on sacks of straw in an old-fashioned Wiltshire waggon. The trees in their fresh young verdure form a long Gothic aisle, and cast a soft green subdued light around; the gentle summer breeze ever and anon lifts the flapping canvas, and bears to you the fragrance of hedges filled with honeysuckle, and of fields covered with the newly-mown hay; while the twittering of the lately-fledged songsters, the saucy whistle of the blackbird, and the tinkling of the bells upon the necks of the horses, combine to make a pleasant lullaby.

Most of the party would willingly have pro-

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longed this agreeable drive, but Lily and Nannie were getting very impatient to see grandpapa, grandmamma, and Aunt Sarah again, notwithstanding their attempt to wile away the time by telling each other all the tales they could remember. Mr. and Mrs. Locke were both on the lawn when the conveyances entered the white gates, ready to greet their visitors; and there also was Aunt Sarah, and with her a tall, sunburnt man, who came forward to offer his assistance in unloading the waggon, much obstructed, however, in his progress by the violent conduct of Mr. Rough, who evidently did not approve of his showing any attention to any one but himself. And when at last ordered, in a voice that could not be disobeyed, to "lie down," the good old fellow adopted the alternative of dancing backwards upon his hind legs a little in front of the stranger, expressing his devotion in this less inconvenient manner.

"How many of these young ladies are my nieces?" asked the gentleman, laughing, as he lifted them out of the waggon.

"Now let us see," said Aunt Sarah, "whether

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your instinct will not tell you which are your relations."

"My instinct is not nearly of so fine a quality as old Rough's. I see whom he has singled out," replied the stranger, as the dog sprang upon Lily and Nannie.

"It is Uncle Walter come back!" exclaimed the little girls. "Oh, how glad mamma will be!"

"To be sure. Ah, I see I shall be safe in kissing these two. They are Mary's children, and no mistake," said Uncle Walter.

"Why, Aunt Sarah," said Lily, "you never told us that Uncle Walter was come home."

"Because I did not know it until I saw him here the day before yesterday," replied Aunt Sarah. "The letters which he sent to announce the return of his vessel were lost."

"Is that your uncle?" whispered Gertrude March. "I like him so much."

"Yes," replied Lily. "He is a lieutenant. He went to sea before we were born, and he has not been home since, until now. He has only seen Alfred."

"And now," said Uncle Walter, "I suppose

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all of you young ladies are aware of the purpose for which you were invited here. Mr. Locke expects that large field beyond the garden to be mown, turned, raked, tossed, hay-cocked, and finally made into a mow before sunset, therefore I propose to pipe all hands at once."

"Come along," said Aunt Sarah, leading the way to the gate.

"You surely are not going to tack round the lane this hot afternoon," said Uncle Walter. "Why shouldn't we go straight a-head across the Ha-ha? That used to be the way when I was young."

"I thought some of the young ladies might not like such a jump," replied Aunt Sarah.

"That is soon settled," said Uncle Walter, taking up a garden-seat and proceeding to fix it across the Ha-ha, so as to form a sort of bridge. "Now," continued he, "who will be the first to walk the plank?"

"I," cried Gertrude March. "I'm afraid of nothing. I'll always be the first to go anywhere, and do anything; for I'm a plucky fellow, as my brother Jack says, and he is a true sailor."

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"I'm proud to think that I'm the same," said Uncle Walter; "but there is something I am more proud of still."

"What is that?" asked Gertrude.

"Why," replied Uncle Walter, dryly, "it is that *my sisters* have never desired to be anything more remarkable than true ladies."

Gertrude looked somewhat disconcerted, as she ran across to the other side.

They had all passed in safety excepting Miss Cotton, who now hung back, protesting that she was so frightened; she was such a timid creature; she really didn't think she could make up her mind to venture.

"Pray do not attempt it," said Uncle Walter, "if it makes you uncomfortable. You will, no doubt, prefer remaining in the garden with Mrs. Stafford and my father and mother." So he coolly walked over, leaving Miss Cotton on the other side.

But this was not at all what the young lady intended. She wished to make a little fuss, and create a sensation, but she had no idea of remaining where she was; so, after the party had walked on to the other end of

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the field, in a very unconcerned manner, she quietly helped herself across, and soon joined them.

The merry party dispersed about the field, tossing the sweet hay, or sitting together in groups upon it beneath the shade of the trees. Aunt Sarah told some of her best stories to those who preferred to remain quiet, while Uncle Walter was most indefatigable in amusing the younger and more lively portion of the company. He was a great giant, catching all who ventured upon his domain; an old bird, with a nest full of chirping little ones; a fierce hurricane, driving the hay about over everybody; and an alarming earthquake, rising from beneath a haycock, and threatening to swallow up everything in his way.

At length the summons came to tea, which was spread upon a table upon the lawn, within a circle of standard roses, all in full bloom, and filling the air with their rich fragrance. Abundance of cake of different kinds, with strawberries and cream in two immense bowls, might have tempted less hearty appetites than those of the young party.

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The meal was scarcely over, when Thomas came up to Aunt Sarah, and said—

"If you please, Miss, if so be as you don't see no objection, there's some of these 'ear little ladies as have a great mind for a ride upon the pony. If it's agreeable, I'll bring him round."

"Certainly," replied Aunt Sarah; "bring him out into the field, Thomas. I suppose you have no objection, Mrs. Stafford?"

"I should not like any who are not used to riding to mount him, I think," replied Mrs. Stafford. "I hope he is very quiet."

"The old pony is dead," said Aunt Sarah, "and we have not had this one very long; but I think he seems to be a very well-behaved young gentleman."

"I will take care of them, Mrs. Stafford," said Uncle Walter. "I will keep my hand on the rein the whole time; they shall not go off alone."

"On that condition," replied Mrs. Stafford, "I am sure I may give the permission. You understand, do you not, young ladies, that you are none of you to ride the pony alone?"

The party then adjourned to the field, where Thomas soon followed leading the pony.

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Several of the girls had mounted him, and ridden him up and down the field, led by Uncle Walter, when at length it came to Gertrude March's turn.

"I have no notion of such a slow affair as this," said she, as she took her seat, "I can manage him myself very well, thank you;" and before Uncle Walter could take hold of the rein, she gave it a jerk, striking the pony at the same time with a little switch, with which she had provided herself. Off started the pony, kicking up his heels, and galloping down the field as hard as he could go, pleased, like Gertrude, to be able to act in a more independent manner.

Now Gertrude had never been on a pony before, but having seen other ladies ride, she fancied nothing could be easier than to stick to the saddle; but to her astonishment, she found herself thrown up and down in the most uncomfortable manner, and presently losing her hold of the pommel, she slipped down, dragged along by one foot, which was still caught in the stirrup.

Fortunately the grass was so soft that she was little injured by the fall, and soon Thomas

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GERTRUDE'S ACCIDENT. [*Page* 106.

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and Uncle Walter came up, and disengaged her from her dangerous position; but the ancle of the foot which had been in the stirrup was so strained that she could not stand, and it gave her the most severe pain.

"What has happened?" exclaimed she, at length, looking round with surprise, as the rest of the party came up.

"Happened?" said Uncle Walter, "why you have been disobeying orders, and must now suffer the consequence, young lady. Here, Thomas," continued he, as he set her on the pony, "take this young lady round to the house, go up the lane, and in at the back door, so as not to alarm any one, and tell Betsey to see what she can do for her foot."

So Gertrude was led off, feeling thoroughly vexed and mortified by her humiliating situation, and suffering also from the strain. Miss Jackson accompanied her, and undertook to tell Mrs. Stafford of the circumstance.

The other girls felt but little disposed to try the pony after this, and soon Mrs. Stafford summoned them to the house, as she was anxious to start for their return home.

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Before they left, Aunt Sarah told Lily and Nannie that mamma and the baby were coming down to Ethelston House very soon, and that they were to meet her there when the school broke up; and that it was arranged for them all to go to Weymouth to spend the holidays. Grandpapa, grandmamma, Aunt Sarah, and Uncle Walter were to be there also, and papa would bring Alfred and Herbert down from London to join them.

Uncle Walter also requested that a holiday letter might be sent to him, to announce the day when the vacation commenced, and he would come over to Bath and fetch the little girls.

This was very pleasant indeed to look forward to, and Lily and Nannie talked and thought about it all the way as they travelled in the waggon to Chippenham.

Gertrude March went with Mrs. Stafford in the carriage, but she was very quiet and subdued, and did not speak a word the whole way. The party reached home in safety soon after nine o'clock, very tired, but with the bright remembrance of a very happy day.

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As Mrs. Stafford went up-stairs to bed, she looked into Gertrude's room, feeling still somewhat anxious as to the effects of her fall. She was not asleep, and, jumping up as soon as she saw Mrs. Stafford, she said—

"Oh, Mrs. Stafford, I have been so hoping that you might come in. I wanted so to tell you how sorry I am that I have been so naughty and disobedient. I am afraid you are so displeased, for you did not speak a word to me coming home."

"My dear," said Mrs. Stafford, sitting down beside her, "I was indeed vexed and grieved that anyone under my care could have been so thoughtless and disobedient, and I tell you now plainly, that this is not the first time that your conduct and manners have given me pain. You may think it a fine thing to be spirited and independent, but there is a vast difference between real independence and frankness, and that silly affectation of it which I have observed in you."

"Do you think I am affected, Mrs. Stafford?" asked Gertrude. "Why, there is nothing I hate so much as mincing, missy ways."

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"It is as easy to affect a vulgar boldness as a silly weakness, Gertrude," answered Mrs. Stafford. "And of the two I think the former is certainly the most repugnant. But I do not want you to seem anything that you are not. I do not wish you to *put on* anything, in order to appear lady-like; but remember, my dear, what St. Paul tells us is to be, not the outside manners, but the character, the *hidden* ornament of a Christian woman. Seek by prayer and watchfulness that inward adorning of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price, and in essential things you will be all that is outwardly refined and lady-like."

"I am vexed," said Gertrude—"I really am. I feel somehow as if it was wrong, but I never thought anything about it before. Grandmamma used to scold me, and make a great fuss, and then Jack used to laugh, and altogether there was a great stir, and I liked that, and so——but I do wish to be different, Mrs. Stafford."

"Pray to God, my dear, to help you," said Mrs. Stafford, "and to make you like Christ,

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who says—'Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in *heart*.' It may seem a small and trifling matter to you, when you indulge in any freak to which your fancy prompts you, but the consequences of such a disposition are far more serious than you can at present imagine. You may not understand the reason why you should or should not do certain things, but you may always depend upon this, that what is considered generally by good and refined persons to be wrong or undesirable, has not been so stamped without real and sufficient cause. And now, my dear, good night."

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CHAPTER VIII.

BREAKING UP.

THE time passed quickly away after the party at Ethelston House, till the day drew near for those who had been companions together for the last five months to disperse to their several homes.

The last lessons had been repeated, the last walk taken, the masters had paid their last visits, and now the morning of "packing-up day" had arrived.

At an early hour all were busied in clearing their drawers, and arranging the various articles usually contained in them upon the beds, ready for being placed in the boxes. The inventories of the different wardrobes were brought out, and missing articles searched for. There was a continual running to and fro, up and down stairs, and in and out of the various rooms, very different from the usual order in the household.

Merry voices sang scraps of songs, made

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vows of perpetual friendship, demanded lost gloves and boots, prophesied where each companion would be this time to-morrow; gave addresses and promises to write, and related the anticipated pleasures of the holidays, all in one confused murmur, that not even the presence of Mrs. Stafford and the teachers could in any way subdue.

The worst time, however, was the latter part of the day, when the boxes, ready corded and directed, were brought down into the hall, when the umbrellas and shawls had been strapped together, and there literally was nothing to do, by which the leaden-footed hours might be coaxed to accelerate their speed.

At an early hour, all retired to bed, but few to sleep, and those only to dream of being too late for trains, or of the dreadful impossibility of dressing, and the strange loss of every requisite article while the cab stood waiting at the door.

Miss Cotton and Miss Steele were to go to Manchester, and had, therefore, to leave by an early train, and this gave an excuse for a very early breakfast for the whole party. It was a

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fearful blank, after they had gone, for those who sauntered through the desolated rooms waiting their time.

It was scarcely nine, when the servant entered the school-room and announced that the Miss Warringtons were come for. Yes, there was Uncle Walter, faithful to his promise to fetch them. He had arranged to return to Chippenham by the next train, and they must, therefore, leave at once.

After going through an immense quantity of kissing and hugging, and farewells of every kind, they found themselves at last, with all their boxes, driving to the station, really going home.

Mamma, Uncle Walter told them, had arrived last night at Ethelston House, and was looking very well, and the baby—— But here Uncle Walter was obliged to confess that his observations were quite insufficient to enable him to reply to all the inquiries proposed to him on this subject. He could not tell whom Baby resembled, whether his eyes were light or dark blue, whether he had cut any teeth, nor even his precise size and weight; but he

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thought, when he took him out of Bennet's arms as she was getting out of the train, that he was exceedingly small, and of no weight at all.

Of course Lily and Nanny did not believe this; but they came to the conclusion that Uncle Walter could know nothing at all about babies, and soon, O, how soon! they would see him for themselves. The road, now become so familiar, was soon passed, and the carriage had scarcely stopped at grandpapa's door, before mamma and Aunt Sarah were seen waiting to welcome the little travellers.

In the hall stood Betsey, beaming with satisfaction at having a baby in the house again, and holding in her arms the distinguished little individual, ready to be introduced to his sisters.

Of course his appearance fully realised all their fondest hopes, and he was pronounced "the most beautiful darling that ever was," and *so* large, and *so* heavy, in spite of Uncle Walter's unfeeling judgment.

What a delightful occupation it was to nurse this real live baby! so different from a doll.

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They seemed such hard, common-place affairs after this smiling, kicking, crying little being, so soft and pink, showing already, by the way he looked out of those mild blue eyes, and by the clasp of his little round hand, that there was a beating, loving heart within, ready to return the affection lavished upon him.

Much of Lily and Nannie's time during the next few days was spent in the nursery, helping and watching all that concerned this sweet little brother; yet they did not forget to look forward to the happy meeting which was soon to take place with their "old brothers," as they now designated Alf and Hib, very different in their noisy, teasing, riotous way from this soft little creature, but still very dear, and not to be superseded in their affections even by the new treasure.

Various little arrangements had to be made before they could proceed to Weymouth. Their summer dresses, which mamma and Bennet had brought with them, had to be looked over, and let down an astonishing piece; some suitable jackets and hats, warranted to stand any amount of ill-usage and sea-water, had to be

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provided, until at length all were ready, and one fine morning the whole party, including the baby, found themselves inside a railway carriage, on their way to visit the great sea.

Uncle Walter had thrown out many hints as to the propriety of engaging a separate carriage as a nursery, but even he confessed, at the end of the journey, that there never was such a baby. He had at first starting suggested that it might be put into the net with the sticks and umbrellas, next he had condescended to "hold" it for some minutes, and finally had contrived a nice little bed for it with shawls and cloaks, where it slept soundly till they arrived in Weymouth.

There they found papa and the boys awaiting them. They had come down by an early train, and had been wandering about by the sea for more than an hour.

Lily and Nannie had been looking forward with great delight to introducing baby to the boys, but these young gentlemen did not seem to be nearly so much impressed by the honour as the little girls had anticipated; for on Lily's exclaiming, "Alf, here's the baby! Isn't he

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the greatest beauty you ever saw?" he replied, "Oh, you can't think what jolly little beggars the crabs are! It's such fun catching them, and they bite like anything; and there's a man-of-war off Portland, and we've seen some of her men."

"And such lots of shells, and sea-weed, and old fishes," said Herbert, "and spades. Papa bought us each one, and we've made a canal. Oh, do come along down to the beach and see it!"

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CHAPTER IX.

THE HOLIDAYS.

As this is to be a record of Lily and Nannie's school-days, we must not enter too fully into the history of those fast-fleeing six weeks which intervene between the two long half-years.

Our merry party had been at Weymouth for more than a week, when one afternoon, as they were sitting on the beach, the boys and Uncle Walter busy in the construction of a great salt water lake, in which certain small vessels might sail in safety, and the little girls in collecting shells—their attention was attracted by the persevering determination of a donkey to climb a sand bank, instead of proceeding in a becoming manner along the beach. In vain the young lady, mounted upon his back, pulled the rein, and attempted to turn his head, in vain did the boy use his stick most vigorously, and in vain did the maid-servant remonstrate, and assure the determined beast that "it was too bad,

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when the young lady couldn't walk, but must go where he took her."

"Why, I really do believe," cried Lily, presently, "that it is Gertrude March. I am sure that is her little brown hat."

"And it is just like her jacket," said Nannie, "I wish we could see her face. Do look, Uncle Walter, you always know people such a long way off."

Uncle Walter stopped his work, and watched the figures for a moment, then advancing towards them, he laid his hand on the bridle of the donkey, and turned him round, leading him carefully down the sand bank. Presently he said, "Well, young lady, have you learned to obey orders yet?"

Gertrude looked rather foolish as she recognised him, and answered, as she held down her head, "I don't know. I think I have tried to be better."

"Keep a straight course," said Uncle Walter, "and you will be a good woman yet one of these days."

Lily and Nannie greeted Gertrude with great delight, and she was soon seated with them on

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the sands, while Uncle Walter dismissed the donkey boy. Lady March had brought Gertrude to Weymouth the evening before, but having to visit some friends, had left her that day to the care of the maid, under whose auspices she had, as we have seen, made her first attempt at donkey-riding, with not much better success than had attended her equestrian performance. The afternoon passed very happily, and the little girls were delighted to have met, and formed many pleasant schemes for expeditions together, most of which were carried into effect.

One stormy morning near the end of these happy holidays, as Lily and Nannie were preparing to spend a happy quiet time with Aunt Sarah and Mamma, a Bath-chair stopped at the door, and Gertrude alighted from it.

"Grandmamma told me I might come and spend the morning with you," said she, as she entered; "and as she has just given me a new book, I brought it round, that we might read it together. It is called 'The Heir of Redclyffe.' Have you ever read it?"

"I have, my dear," replied Mamma, "and so has Aunt Sarah; but Lily and Nannie have

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not. It is indeed a very interesting and a very good book. I am sure you will like it, and it will be a pleasure to me to hear it again."

Any one who looked at Lily's face at this moment, must have seen a very troubled expression pass over it; but she bent her head down over her work and said nothing.

Gertrude began to read, and then they each took the book in turn, until at length they had got through a considerable part of the first volume, when Nannie exclaimed, "Oh, I do hope that Guy had not done anything wrong!"

"He hadn't," cried Lily, "he hadn't done anything at all. He was so good. It was all that horrid Philip's invention."

"Was it?" said Gertrude. "I thought so; but how do you know, Lily? Have you read it before?"

Lily coloured up so much, that her confusion attracted mamma's attention, and she said, "When did you read it, Lily, my dear?"

"I do not know," replied Lily, "at least—I mean—it was while we were at school."

"At school!" exclaimed Gertrude. "Who had it at school? I wish I had seen it."

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"Some of the girls had it, I believe," answered Lily.

"And when did you read it, Lily?" asked Nannie; "you never told me anything about it."

"I thought some one said that Mrs. Stafford did not allow any tales to be brought into the school but those which she read to us," said Gertrude.

"Is that so?" asked mamma.

"I believe the girls said so," replied Lily.

"Then how, and when did you read it, my dear?" inquired Aunt Sarah.

Lily hesitated for a few moments, and then answered, "I promised I would never tell any one in the world."

"I do not wish you to break your promise, Lily," said mamma, "but I am indeed most grieved and surprised, that my little girl should ever consent, for the sake of reading an interesting tale, to deceive Mrs. Stafford, to disobey her wishes, and to condescend to so mean and hateful a thing as a secret arrangement of this kind."

"Oh, mamma!" exclaimed Lily, bursting into tears, "it was quite by accident that I found

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out that some of the girls were reading it, and it gave me no pleasure, for I was so unhappy."

"I am glad to hear, my dear child, that you could not engage in any underhand and unallowed pursuit without being unhappy; but beware of the first step in a crooked course; each one, as it leads you on to greater misery, becomes easier and easier. There was no real harm, as you know, in reading the 'Heir of Redclyffe,' if you had waited until the holidays, or asked Mrs. Stafford's permission, then all would have been right; but as a secret and disobedient act, it is a sin, and a beginning in a most dangerous and fearful road."

"Mamma," said Lily, "I never will promise to keep a secret again."

"That is a good resolution, Lily, but do not make it in your own strength alone. You cannot tell how much you may be tempted. Pray to be kept ever pure and truthful in act and word. The best way to avoid a promise of secresy, is to refuse to hear the secret at once. Curiosity, and the desire to know more than others about some person or circumstance, often tempt persons to make promises, which they afterwards much

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regret. I should like you both, while you are as young as you now are, to remember it as my particular wish, that you should never engage not to speak to me of anything which you may hear or see. I do not mean that you should feel it incumbent upon you to literally tell me everything, but I do not wish you ever to bind yourselves in any way not to do so."

Lily and Nannie both agreed to remember and attend to mamma's wish in this respect, and Lily felt happier already, to think that mamma now knew her secret. The dispositions of both inclined them to be open, and this was really the only occasion when either had been tempted to be otherwise.

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CHAPTER X.

AN EVENING WITH LADY MARCH.

THE holidays had passed away, and the happy party at Weymouth had broken up. Mamma came herself with Lily and Nannie to Mrs. Stafford's, and after she had left, the half-year seemed to have fairly begun, and regular, earnest work to take the place of desultory pleasures.

Gertrude March had quite recovered the use of her usually nimble feet, and now jumped and danced about as merrily as ever. She had been Lily's and Nannie's constant companion during the holidays, and an intimacy had grown up between them which seemed likely to prove mutually beneficial, for she possessed just the independence of character and action in which Lily especially was somewhat wanting; while the regard for the opinion of others, and the quiet submission to authority, shown upon all occasions by our two little heroines, had an excellent effect in subduing Gertrude's impetu-

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osity and dangerous tendency to perverseness and defiance.

Lady March was very kind to Lily and Nannie while they were at Weymouth, and obtained permission from Mrs. Warrington for them to visit her frequently during the coming half-year. Before they returned to school, Uncle Walter had again left England, and would not be likely to return for at least two years—a long time it seemed to the children, by the end of which they asserted they should be "quite great girls."

Mrs. Stafford's household consisted of nearly the same individuals as in the last half-year. Miss Vincent had left, and a young lady, named Clara Prestwich, occupied the vacancy; but this was the only change.

Soon after the return of our two little heroines to school, Mrs. Stafford announced to them one morning that she had received an invitation for them and Gertrude to spend the evening with Lady March. She intended dining early, and wished the children to come directly the afternoon school was over.

At half-past five, accordingly, the three little

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girls found themselves at the door of Lady March's house, and soon after in the presence of the old lady herself.

Her drawing-room itself was a place where it would be a treat for any children to find themselves, especially alone, when they might take up and examine more closely the numberless curious things lying about on the tables and chiffonniers, unwatched by the sharp eyes of their mistress.

Lady March received her little visitors very kindly, and invited them first to take their seats at the centre table, where the "tea equipage," as she called it, was spread ready for them.

After the tea was over, the little girls were allowed to examine the various curiosities around them, and Lady March told them many amusing and exciting anecdotes connected with the wonderful things which she showed them. She had a peculiar power of interesting her hearers in all she told them, and the children were so much fascinated and delighted, that when Lady March at length proposed that they should play at some game together, they all petitioned her for another story.

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"Another, and a longer one, please, grandmamma," said Gertrude. "Let it be about yourself, when you were a little girl."

"Oh! yes," exclaimed Lily, "I do so like to hear about grown-up people when they were children. If you could tell us what you did when you were young, Lady March, it would be so nice!"

"Well, where shall I begin?" asked Lady March.

"Begin with the first thing which you can remember, grandmamma," said Gertrude.

"I think I must have been about five years old," began Lady March, "when the first event occurred, of which I have any distinct recollection. Before that time everything is vague and misty; but that scene is perfectly well impressed upon my memory. It does not seem to me that I had ever heard any one say that my father was about to leave us; but I can recall an unusual bustle in the household for a few days before, which even penetrated to my secluded nursery. On this memorable morning, however, I have a distinct remembrance of the entrance of the nursery-maid into the room where

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I was lying half awake, when, catching me up hastily in her arms, she wrapped a shawl round me, and carried me down into the hall. There I saw my mother standing in the midst of several packages, to some of which she was tying the addresses. Presently my father appeared, and at the same moment a coach drew up to the door. He took me in his arms and kissed me, saying, 'God bless you, my daughter, and make you a comfort to your mother.'

"I remember I wished very much to see him get into the coach, and to watch it drive from the door; but my nurse-maid carried me up-stairs to the nursery again, and from that time I saw my father no more."

"Did he never come back?" asked Nannie.

"No, my dear," replied Lady March. "It must have been two years after that when the painful intelligence arrived that my dear father had been killed at the siege of Gibraltar. My mother never recovered from the shock of my father's death. She shut herself up in her own rooms, and scarcely saw any one but her maid. I was occasionally admitted to her presence; but I was naturally boisterous and wilful, and

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THE DEPARTURE. [*Page* 130.

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my being left to the care of servants, who indulged me in every way, had fostered these evils in my character, so that my visits to my mother generally ended in my banishment from the room for some act of wilfulness. I cannot say it was with much regret that I learned one morning that it had pleased God to take my mamma to Himself, and that she was therefore now with my papa. I had no idea that this event would cause any difference in my life; but I soon found my mistake. A day or two after my mother's death, as I was playing in the nursery, I heard the sound of wheels, and peeping from behind the closed blinds, I saw a tall lady, followed by a middle-aged woman, alighting from a large family coach which stood at the door. My nurse, in answer to my inquiries, informed me that this was my Aunt Alicia, and she soon after took me down-stairs to see her.

"As nurse led me down, I remember she took care to impress upon me that I was to be sure and make my curtsey when I went into the room, and to mind and say, 'Yes, if you please, ma'am,' and 'No, thank you, ma'am,' when my

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aunt spoke to me, for that she was mighty particular.

"As soon as I entered the room I saw before me the tall, imposing figure of my aunt, and to this day every little particular of her dress and appearance is deeply impressed upon my memory. She was a woman considerably above the middle height, and this was further increased by the elevation of her head-dress. Her hair, according to the fashion of some years previous, was raised over an immense cushion, upon this she wore a drapery of muslin and lace, and on the summit was pinned a black silk bonnet—this, I may as well tell you here, she constantly wore both indoors and out—her gown was of black satin, open in front, and I can now recall the very pattern of the embroidered cambric apron, which covered the front of a crimson silk petticoat, adorned with gold and coloured silks.

"She seated herself, as she saw me, with the dignity of a queen taking her place upon a throne, and calling me to her side, said, 'My niece, Alicia, I presume. I am happy to see you, child. Prepare in a few days to accompany me to Walton Grange, where I shall for the

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future shelter you, and train you in all the accomplishments and good-breeding necessary for a young gentlewoman. Have you learnt no manners?' continued she, as I looked up at her, staring in astonishment, and wholly forgetful of my nurse's injunctions. I considered for a moment, and then making my best curtsey, I replied, 'Yes, if you please, ma'am.'

"'You resemble your father, child,' said she, taking my face between her hands; 'his eyes and mouth. You have courage and parts, little sensibility, but enough mother-wit to know how to take care of yourself. Now return to the nursery.'

"Thus ended my first interview with my Aunt Alicia, and I scarcely saw her again during the time that she remained in the house. I do not know how long that may have been, but I was beginning to forget her and the impression she had made upon me, when one day my nurse entered the room crying bitterly, and throwing her arms around me, she told me that my aunt was going to take me the next day to Walton Grange, and that she was not allowed to go with me.

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"I protested immediately that I would never leave the house, and that she should always live there with me.

"Full of this idea, I flew down-stairs, and rushed into the drawing-room, exclaiming, 'Aunt Alicia, I shall not go with you to-morrow. I do not intend to leave this house, and nurse shall not go either. It is my house, and you shall not take it away from me.'

"'Silly child,' said my aunt, 'return to the nursery, and request nurse to pack up your things.'

"'I won't! I won't!' cried I, screaming with passion, and stamping my feet. 'You are a horrid old woman, and I don't like you a bit!'

"'What monstrous folly,' replied my aunt, unmoved; then turning to her maid, who was in the room, she said, 'Rivers, carry the child up-stairs.'

"Rivers, who was a strong woman, and almost as tall as her mistress, put her arms round me and carried me off, while I vented my impotent rage by kicking her wherever I could.

"'You'll be broke in soon enough, miss,'

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was her only remark, as, with a grim smile upon her hard-featured face, she placed me on the nursery floor.

"Nurse was already packing up my things. I darted to one box, which was now half filled, and turning the contents out upon the ground, I bid nurse replace them in the drawers, for that I was quite determined not to go with my aunt, but should live in the house with her.

"'Oh, Miss Alicia,' replied she, 'but you must go if your aunt wishes it, for how are you to stay here? You cannot live by yourself.'

"'Just as I have always lived, nurse,' I replied, 'and I shall not be by myself, for I shall have you with me.'

"'But where is the money to come from, miss?' said she; 'you forget all about that.'

"'Money,' replied I, 'we shall not want any money, and besides, I have got half-a-guinea, which I will give to you if you will stay.'

"'Oh, miss," said she, 'but what is half-a-guinea, when you come to pay for everything? Why it wouldn't last no time.'

"This was a new idea to me, for hitherto I

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had received everything I wanted, as the want arose, and it had never struck me before to inquire where the things had come from, and how they were to be procured.

"At last I said, 'But, nurse, you have some money locked up in your red workbox, I know. Won't that do to buy things with?'

"'My money, Miss Alicia!' exclaimed nurse 'Tis little enough as I've laid by, and there would be the house rent, the servants' wages, the meat and the bread, and the beer, to say nothing of tea and sugar; why 'twould cost a pretty deal more than everything I've saved, so it's no use, my dear young lady, you must go with your aunt, Miss Arbuthnot, like a good girl.'

"All the evening I thought this over. It seemed a terrible thing to me to discover that so many things were stronger than my will, and that I could not have my own way. I perplexed myself with speculating whether it would be possible for other people to make me do what I had determined not to do, and then I tried to devise some plan for carrying out my own wishes; but at length coming to the conclusion that if I did not yield I must starve, I deter-

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mined to say nothing more about it, but to go with my aunt on the morrow.

"At half-past five o'clock the next morning, Aunt Alicia's great coach was brought round to the door, and we started on our journey. Aunt Alicia and her packages occupied one seat, and Rivers and I the other.

"We proceeded very slowly, for the country roads in those days were none of the best even in summer, and I was often jolted into Aunt Alicia's lap, or upon Rivers' shoulder, until at last aunt produced a shawl, with which she proceeded to tie me into the corner of the carriage.

"This was far more comfortable than being thrown backwards and forwards, or from side to side every moment; but I fancied it implied in some way that I was a prisoner, and resented it accordingly by tugging at the shawl, and declaring that I would not have it so.

"Aunt Alicia smiled, and Rivers remarked that 'Little ladies did not always know what was the best for them.'

"'It is a hard matter for us to keep ourselves from falling,' said Aunt Alicia; 'but we are

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not always willing to own that it is a blessed thing to be kept.'

"Not long after this, we drove into a large town, and, it being now about noon, we put up at the inn, and remained there for an hour or two to rest the horses and dine. I remember, while dinner was preparing, that I stood at the window of the room which we occupied, watching all that was going on in the square court-yard below.

"My curiosity was greatly excited by the sight of the number of travellers who were coming and going, and I wondered much who all these persons could be, where they lived, and what they were about.

"At last my Aunt Alicia said to me, looking up from the book which she was reading, 'Come hither, child, and tell me what your thoughts may be.'

"'I want so much to know,' replied I, 'who all these people are that come and go from this house.'

"'Travellers like ourselves,' said she, 'journeying the same road. We meet and pass for a moment, and see one another no more again.'

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"After dinner we resumed our journey until nightfall, when we again rested at a country inn. At an early hour the next morning, we set out again for Walton Grange, and towards the afternoon we reached the village of Walton, the house being about a mile on the other side.

"A simple wooden gate admitted the carriage into a field, and the grand drive presently terminated before two immense doors, studded with iron, in a high wall. A bell was rung, and, on the doors being thrown open, the carriage entered a yard surrounded by stables and coach-houses.

"Here we alighted, and presently another smaller door was unfastened, which opened on a narrow bridge, taking the place of the old drawbridge across the moat.

"Crossing this, the house appeared—a low, square, stone building, standing on a gravelled terrace, bordered by flower-beds and high yew hedges. Beneath the terrace was the moat, which entirely surrounded the house, being filled with running water from a brook hard by. In the moat grew the largest and most beautiful water-lilies that I have ever seen, and

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by the side of the water there was a pleasant grass walk communicating by a flight of stone steps with the terrace.

"The house itself was what may be called a hollow square, the space in the centre being termed the court-yard. On entering you found yourself in a narrow passage, on one side of which was the library, a small room surrounded by book-shelves, filled with old brown leather-covered volumes, with many of which I was afterwards to form an intimate acquaintance; but I suspect in these days it would be difficult to induce young people to peruse them. In this room we always breakfasted and spent the morning. At first the hours which I spent there were tinged with weariness and disgust, for my heart rebelled against all the instructions of my Aunt Alicia, and I was determined not to profit by them; but after a time, with what joy and profit do I now look back upon those happy seasons!

"My aunt commenced by subduing my will to hers; but her desire was to be no mere tyrant, and soon she began to lead me into those pleasant and holy walks in which she herself so

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greatly delighted. In company with her I made acquaintance with all the great writers of that and past ages.

"My aunt knew these all well, but she never wearied of their company, seeking constantly, with a faithful love, for some hitherto unsuspected beauty or deeper meaning. She read much and widely, which was in those days remarkable; but she did also what is in these days still more rare, she *meditated.*

"A page of Shakespeare, Milton, or some early poet, would suffice for a morning's lesson, and her original and profound reflections upon it were often as interesting and profitable as the passage itself.

"The Book of all books, the Holy Scriptures, she most especially studied, and although utterly unlearned in modern information and criticism, her thorough and simple faith in every word, her ready and apt illustrations from the great volumes of life and Nature enforced belief and practice more powerfully than the keenest arguments or 'evidences.'

"But I will finish my description of Walton Grange, for hitherto we have advanced no

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further than the library. On the other side of the entrance was the dining-room, a long oak-panelled apartment, in which hung several pictures, among them one of my aunt and my mother, the latter as a little child, dressed in a long white frock, and a little round embroidered cap without a border, on her head. In her hand she held a large full blown rose, which she appeared to have just snatched away from my Aunt Alicia—a tall young lady of about fifteen, in a long-waisted, pale green silk dress and hoop, having a quantity of light auburn hair, partly frizzed, and partly hanging in large curls upon her shoulders. Once, I remember, as I was looking at this picture, I said to my aunt, 'Aunt Alicia, did mamma really take away your rose?'

"'Ah,' replied she, 'it seemed like a prophecy then; yet it was but an artist's fancy, and it was the Lord who gave and who took away.'

"The other pictures were those of different ancestors of the family, with the exception of one, painted, as my aunt once told me, at the same time, and by the same artist, as that of my mother and herself. It was that of a

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young man, it might be of twenty or thereabouts, with remarkably black, brilliant eyes, and jet-black curling hair.

"I remember, the night of my arrival at Walton Grange, that as soon as we had finished taking tea, which was set for us in the library, my aunt took me by the hand and, leading me into the dining-room, placed me on a chair just beneath this picture.

"'The likeness is even greater than I had fancied,' said my aunt, half aloud, as she looked from me to the picture.

"'What!' exclaimed I, as I jumped down from the chair. 'Am I like that man, Aunt Alicia?'

"'It would not be wonderful if you were,' replied my aunt. 'He was your father, child.'

"'My father!' said I; 'then how came he here?'

"'He was our cousin,' answered my aunt, 'and grew up beneath this roof. His father and mother both died when he was very young, and your grandfather was his guardian.'

"Beyond the dining-room was the drawing-room, a door at the end of the former apart-

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ment communicating with the latter. This was the pleasantest room in the house. It formed one entire side of the square, and had three long windows opening out upon the terrace. The paper was a curious Indian manufacture, covered with birds and flowers in the most brilliant colouring and gilding. The curtains, sofa, and chair coverings were also of bright flower chintz.

"It seems to me now, that the sun always shone into this room, and that it was always filled, all the year round, with the scent of the roses, honeysuckles, and sweet-briar which grew around the windows.

"One evening especially, in this bright and cheerful room, is always present to my memory. I will describe it to you as well as I can, and then I must close this long history of my early days.

"I had now lived for eight years with my Aunt Alicia, and had begun to feel how much, by God's blessing, I owed to her influence and control. For the last few months before the evening of which I speak, I had observed that my aunt experienced a difficulty in

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breathing when walking, and especially in ascending the staircase or any rising ground; I had noticed this to her once or twice, but she merely remarked, 'The infirmities of age, child, nothing more.'

"On this last summer evening we had been sitting together in the drawing-room, and she had been discussing, with even more than her usual interest, of by-gone times, telling me of many little scenes in past years, which seemed now to arise with peculiar vividness before her eyes, and speaking more openly than I had ever known her to do before, of her feelings under certain trials and temptations through which she had passed, and of the wisdom and love which had led and sustained her through all her journeyings in this wilderness. Just before I bade her good night, she repeated, with the wonderful effect that was peculiar to her in reading or repeating poetry, the beautiful lines of the old poet, Henry Vaughan:—

"'They are all gone into a world of light,
And I alone sit lingering here;
Their very memory is fair and bright,
And my sad thoughts doth clear.

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"'I see them walking in an air of glory,
Whose light doth trample on my days;
My days, which are at best but dull and hoary,
Mere glimmerings and decays.

"'Oh, holy hope, and high humility,
High as the heavens above!
These are your walks, and ye have showed them me,
To kindle my cold love.

"'Dear beauteous Death! the jewel of the just!
Shining nowhere but in the dark!
What mysteries do lie beyond thy dust,
Could man outlook that mark!

"'He that hath found some fledged bird's nest may know
At first sight if the bird be flown;
But what fair field or grove he sings in now,
That is to him unknown!

"'And yet as angels in some brighter dreams,
Call to the soul when man doth sleep;
So some strange thoughts transcend our wonted themes,
And into glory peep.'

I lighted my aunt's candle before I quitted the room, and left her still sitting in her arm-chair before the open window, looking forth into a glorious summer night, the full moon making the garden as light as day, and silvering alike

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the massive battlemented wall of the moat, and every delicate little flower and spray. The night was excessively sultry, and soon after the early summer dawn had filled my room, I rose and dressed, intending to steal quietly downstairs, and betake myself to the grass walk by the moat, which I knew would be both shady and cool. To avoid disturbing the household, I went through the drawing-room, intending to let myself out by one of the windows. When I entered the room, I was surprised to see my aunt seated as she had been when I left her. I spoke to her, and receiving no reply, I went up to her, fancying she had fallen asleep, and took her hand. It was cold and dead! she had 'fallen asleep,' indeed, but it was the sleep which knows no waking.

"It was long before I could realise the truth: I stood as if petrified by the touch of that marble hand, gazing on the calm grand face which death had glorified and made beautiful. But at length a ray of sunlight streaming in, led my thoughts to the Heavenly Jerusalem, in which she was even now dwelling.

"The death of my Aunt Alicia changed entirely

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the course of my life. The house which had so long been my home passed into other hands, and it was necessary again that I should leave a place where all my affections had taken a deep root. Among my aunt's papers I found a letter addressed to Sir Richard and Lady March. They were very distant relatives of my mother's, and my aunt had judged them to be the most fitting persons to take charge of me after her decease. The letter had been written, accordingly, some little time previous to this sad event, which it appears was not unanticipated by my aunt

"I lived for five happy years with Sir Richard and Lady March, and only quitted their roof when I became the wife of their eldest son."

"And now, my dear children," said Lady March, "it is getting so late, that I am sure Mrs. Stafford will blame me if I detain you any longer, and I think, too, you must be quite tired of my long yarn."

"No, indeed," replied Lily, "we are so much obliged to you, Lady March. I think it such a pretty story. How much I should like to see

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Walton Grange, and the moat, and the water-lilies."

"I do *so* like to hear stories," said Nannie; "it is so much more interesting than reading them."

"I am very pleased, my dears," answered Lady March, "if I have given you any pleasure by this account of my early days."

The little girls now wished Lady March good evening, and with the promise of a repetition of their pleasant visit, they returned to Mrs. Stafford's under the charge of Lady March's servant.

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CHAPTER XI.

THE FEAST IN THE BOX-ROOM.

THE time now passed quickly, and the half of the second half-year had flown by—that half-year which the children at first thought would be so interminable. Two months had appeared a long dreary time when they had first left home, but that was nothing to the interval between August and December. How would that "age" pass, without seeing mamma once during the whole time? But now September was nearly over, and there seemed some reasonable prospect of Christmas coming at its due period.

In the meantime Lily and Nannie had been at work, and hard, or rather steadily, at work, too.

They had made some steady and safe advances also in another road than that of learning, even on that road which is called the "straight and narrow way." Lily had earnestly and prayerfully tried to do what was right, without

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caring so much what other people thought and said about her; especially had she resisted and prayed to be kept from all temptation to concealment or untruth. And Nannie had truly sought to love all those around her, though they might in many respects be very unlike, and think and act very differently from papa and mamma. She tried to love them, and to be kind to them, and to find the best excuses she could for them, even when she did not approve of their conduct.

And thus they lived, striving to love others, even as Christ had loved them; but they were too truly humble to think of what great things they could do in the world around them.

You must not imagine, however, that as they passed along they had no influence over those with whom they came in contact. That is impossible for any of us. By what we *are*, far more than by what we *do*, do we mould our companions.

You have seen already that their gentleness and refinement had done much to soften and improve Gertrude March, although they had never actually spoken to her on the subject of

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her ill-behaviour at all. Annie Shepherd, too, had somehow left off thinking that it was not expected of children at school that they should be good, and that she might "let things come just as they will." She did not quite know why, but the feeling was growing more and more strong in her mind, that it would not do to be careless and indifferent as she had been, and that she herself had personally to do with those things, of which she had thought it quite enough to hear and read occasionally.

Our little heroines would have been still more surprised had they been told that anything they said or did had any influence over the great girls of the school, to whom the little ones looked up with something like awe; yet so it was, that if Nannie opened her blue eyes in surprise, or Lily turned away in disapprobation, when Miss Cotton, Miss Steele, and Miss Manners began any silly conversation together, the subject flagged, and was dropped far more readily than when exposed to Gertrude's quick ridicule.

It happened about this time that several of the young ladies had had sundry baskets of fruit

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sent to them by their friends in the country, which fruit was kept, by Mrs. Stafford's express desire, in the store closet, and there being much illness at that time in Bath, she thought it best to forbid the young ladies taking more than a small quantity once during the day.

The idea, however, occurred to one or two, that it would be a very delightful and exciting thing to make a feast with this fruit in one of the bed-rooms, after they had retired to rest.

It is well known how quickly the most ridiculous fancies are taken up when people are discontented and cherish a rebellious spirit, and so by degrees it became the general received opinion that those who were not allowed to make themselves ill by eating as much fruit as they chose were very ill-used and oppressed individuals; and even those girls who had nothing themselves took up the cause of those who had, with indignant warmth, being frequently rewarded for their zeal by a share in the contents of the baskets.

The oppressed were decidedly the popular party in the school, and there were only two or three who ventured to stand up for obedience

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and respect to authority. These were principally Nelly More and Clara Prestwich, the young lady who had taken Miss Vincent's place.

Lily and Nannie had no interest in the discontent, having then no good things in store, and being much occupied with their studies and other employments, they went quietly on their way, scarcely aware of the ferment around them.

But now arose the suggestion of the feast in the bedroom. Should the little Warringtons be enlightened upon the subject? was the question often discussed in solemn conclave by the committee who were appointed to arrange the affair and provide the supplies.

The universal opinion appeared to be that our little heroines would refuse to take part in such a scheme. It was known, too, that they had received no hamper lately from home, and that they seldom were provided with any large amount of money, it was surmised also that at present they suspected nothing, so finally the committee resolved—"That Miss More, the Misses Warrington, and Miss Annie Shepherd be not informed of the matter in hand, and that

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any one venturing to hint anything about it to the afore-named ladies, should forfeit one shilling to the general fund."

As they all occupied the same room, it would, of course, be easy enough to keep them in ignorance on the night itself, but the chances were that some one would slip it out beforehand. It was very important, however, to secure Gertrude March. For one reason—she shared the same room with some of those who had engaged to take a part in the frolic, and she was also, which was still more important, always ready to undertake any enterprise in which others might be wanting in courage and decision. It was well known that the risk attending any performance constituted its chief charm for her, so that she could be relied on for carrying out some parts of the scheme, from which the rest shrank. Her intimacy with the little Warringtons, however, made it a difficult matter to depend entirely upon her assistance, for who could say that she might not at the last moment march boldly up to Mrs. Stafford, and reveal the whole.

It was on this account determined that Ger-

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trude should not be taken into the secret until the time was come, when she would be required at once to act, and have no time for reflection.

These things being arranged, the next proceeding was to provide the materials for this banquet. The contents of the store-closet were of course to form the foundation for the feast, but some lighter dainties, such as bon-bons, chocolate, hard-bake, sponge-cakes, &c., were considered necessary to complete the elegance of the entertainment.

At the end of a week, by the exercise of great ingenuity, the ladies of the committee had accumulated a sufficient quantity of these things, which lay carefully hidden away among the linen in their drawers, and amongst them were a few bottles of lemonade and ginger-beer.

They were now able to announce to the public that all was ready, and it was agreed that the grand affair should come off on Wednesday, the 29th September, at half-past nine o'clock, in the box-room at the top of the house.

This was a small room, at the end of the long passage, on the upper storey, and was fixed

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upon as more secure from interruption than either of the bed-rooms. In it were kept the girls' boxes, and some clothes that they were not in the habit of wearing every day, and it was rarely entered by either teachers or servants, so that any preparations might be carried on there beforehand without exciting remark.

The hour fixed upon was that at which Mrs. Stafford and the teachers were occupied at their more humble evening meal in the dining-room. The great day at length arrived, and now Gertrude's services were required, and it became therefore necessary to break the matter to her. The achievement for which she was selected was the conveyance of the contents of the store-closet to the box-room, a feat of no little daring, as all must be carried up the staircase in full daylight, and with the highly probable chance of meeting Mrs. Stafford or some of the teachers upon the way.

The store-closet, I must tell you, was a large cupboard surrounded with shelves, in the passage, on the ground floor, leading to the dining-room. It was always kept locked, but at half-past twelve o'clock, any of those girls who were

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so fortunate as to have a right to any of the good things contained therein, might obtain the key, and keep possession of it for half an hour, when it was to be returned to the housekeeper.

It was arranged, then, that at half-past twelve all the committee were to go down to the store-closet, and pack the provisions in one or two baskets, which Gertrude was to carry and conceal safely in the box-room.

As soon as school was over, therefore, on this eventful day, Miss Cotton, Miss Steele, and Miss Manners called Gertrude on one side, and imparted to her the plot.

"A feast in the box-room to-night!" exclaimed she; "what capital fun! but—but—" and she hesitated.

"I know what you are going to say," said Miss Steele, "the same idea has occurred to all of us, and that is, the impossibility of carrying the things up-stairs without being seen."

"Nothing of the kind," cried Gertrude, "I was only wondering whether it was quite—quite —what shall I say?"

"The fact is," said Miss Cotton, "we have

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everything ready, and such beautiful ginger-beer, and such lovely hard-bake, but we want the fruit and cakes from the store-closet. It would be nothing without them, and the truth is we are all afraid to venture to carry them up the staircase."

"Afraid!" exclaimed Gertrude, "what a set of cowards you are! I'll undertake to carry any thing you like up to the box-room, in broad daylight, and never be seen by any one either."

"Would you really?" asked Miss Steele. "Are you quite sure that your courage would not fail you at the last moment?"

"Sure and certain," replied Gertrude, "my courage is not such a slippery thing as that."

"I am sure, Miss March, we are excessively obliged to you," said Miss Cotton, "and you shall have a good share of the supper yourself, that I'll take care of, and a *meringue*, too, although we have only a very few, for they are so dear."

"And now," said Miss Steele, "you must come with us directly, for we are just going to ask for the key of the closet."

They all went down to the cupboard, and a

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basket was filled as quickly as possible, which Gertrude made off with as rapidly as her nimble feet could carry her, and having deposited the contents in the box-room, she returned for a second load

Three journeys were accomplished in safety, and then the young ladies, returning the key to the housekeeper, adjourned to their banqueting-hall, and succeeded in hiding the good things in and among the trunks.

Gertrude accompanied them, to lend her assistance in keeping watch in the passage, lest either of the girls, who were not in the secret, might happen to come to the room.

As they left, Miss Steele, looking at the door, remarked, what a pity it was that there was no key in the lock, as in that case they might secure the room against all intruders before the evening should arrive.

The afternoon passed as usual, and as soon as school was over, Miss Cotton and Miss Steele paid a stealthy visit to the box-room, to see that all was right. As they returned to the school-room, they met Lily coming out of Mrs. Stafford's room. Their suspicions were at once

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aroused; but on asking her, as indifferently as they could, what she had been doing there, she replied, frankly, that she had been to return a book that Mrs. Stafford had lent her, and she looked so truthful that it was impossible not to believe her. Reading and working occupied the evening. Just before prayers Miss Cotton and Miss Steele slipped up-stairs, and quickly laid out the feast on a table formed by drawing several boxes together, and then covered with a sheet.

Prayers being over, the young ladies retired to their rooms; but as soon as the teachers had made their usual rounds, and extinguished the lights, there was a movement in all the rooms, and twelve of Mrs. Stafford's sixteen select pupils rose, ready dressed, and throwing off their night-caps, which had been put on in order to prevent suspicion on the part of the teachers, they crept, in a shuddering group, hand in hand, up the narrow staircase to the box-room.

Miss Steele and Gertrude were among the foremost, as the least fearful of the party, and consequently reached the door first; but after turning the handle, and shaking it as gently as they dared, the door refused to open.

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"What ever is the matter?" whispered the voices of those behind, in great alarm.

"I do not know," said Miss Steele, "but we cannot open the door."

"The matter is," replied Gertrude, "that we are locked out."

"Impossible!" said Miss Cotton, "there is no key in the door, and Priscilla Steele and I were here but an hour ago, and set out all the things."

Miss Cotton now came forward and tried the door, but it resisted all her efforts. It was evidently fast locked, and there was no entering into the room.

They peeped through the keyhole, and there, by the light of the moon shining through the skylight, they could all *see* the white table, and the various delicacies, apparently within reach of their fingers, but not one could they *touch* or convey to the mouths longing to receive them. A confused terror spread among the whole party. It was evident that Mrs. Stafford had been in some way informed of the scheme, and had taken this way of preventing its accomplishment, and no doubt a store of reproof and

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punishment was laid up for the morrow. If they could only open the door, and smuggle away the things, was the one idea; all thoughts of the banquet now were scattered to the winds.

But every effort was in vain. No one could move that lock, and to continue to push and shake the door was the best way of informing Mrs. Stafford of the success of her plan for their disappointment.

Suddenly some one said that there was a step upon the stairs.

Instantly the terrified assailants retreated in the greatest confusion, springing into bed, ready dressed as they were, and hiding their alarm beneath the clothes.

Excepting in one room, that in which our little heroines and their two companions were quietly reposing, there was little sleep among the girls that night.

As the day broke, and the bell rang soon after, the sense of the impending danger became the more vivid, and it was with anxious and heavy hearts that they assembled in the breakfast-room

"If Mrs. Stafford will only speak out at once

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and have it over," was Miss Steele's observation, as they entered the dining-room, "I should not mind it so very much, I declare;" but Mrs. Stafford received them all as usual, and not a single allusion did she make to the subject in any way.

After breakfast a council was held, as to what was to be done. It seemed desirable to ascertain, first of all, the positive certainty that there had been no mistake about the door being really locked, and that it had not become fixed in any way. But no one appeared willing to venture near the suspicious spot, in order to make a more careful inspection of the circumstances by daylight.

Gertrude at last volunteered to go and examine the door. She had just left them for that purpose, when Miss Manners said, "It strikes me that some one must have let out the plan to the little Warringtons, and that it is they who have informed Mrs. Stafford of the whole affair. It would be just like their nasty, canting ways."

"To be sure;" exclaimed Miss Steele, "how foolish I was never to think of that before

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Why, Eliza Jane, don't you remember our seeing Lily coming out of Mrs. Stafford's room yesterday afternoon? I thought then there was something suspicious in it, but she denied having been there for anything but to return a book, in such a barefaced manner, that I was thoroughly taken in."

"I have not the least doubt," replied Miss Cotton, "that Lily Warrington is the tell-tale. You know what a trouble we had last half about the 'Heir of Redclyffe.' It was as much as ever we could do to make her promise to say nothing about it."

"It's locked, it's locked, as fast as anything," said Gertrude, coming up to them. "I peeped through the crack, and I can see the bolt in the lock. And there are all the things lying spread out there upon the table. I could see them through the keyhole quite plainly. They do look so nice! And there is a bottle of lemonade standing exactly in a sunbeam from the skylight. I know it will explode presently. I shouldn't in the least wonder if we heard the pop down here; but mind, now, that you all jump, as if you didn't know what the sudden noise was."

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"If we could only get the things away, I shouldn't so much mind it," said Miss Steele; "but it's so horrid to think of them all spread out there, and we cannot get to them."

"Yes," replied Miss Cotton, "and those lovely *meringues*, that cost fourpence apiece. I suppose Mrs. Stafford and the teachers will eat them all now. I am sure I never would have given five shillings to the fund, if I had only known that this was to be the end of it all."

"What ever shall we do," said Miss Manners, "if Mrs. Stafford does not unlock the door before Sunday? You know all our best things are in the boxes in that room; and the idea of going to church in all our common clothes! But perhaps that is the way Mrs. Stafford intends to punish us."

"I should not in the least wonder, if that is to be our punishment," answered Gertrude; "Mrs. Stafford knows it would be one of the greatest she could devise for some of us."

"And there's my new autumn bonnet," said Miss Manners, "that I only had sent this week, and have never yet put on. Oh, Mrs.

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Stafford never could be so cruel as that! What shall we do? Could we ask for the key?"

"Ask for the key?" replied Miss Steele; "I should think not, indeed. Our only way is to carry it off as well as we can. If Mrs. Stafford says nothing to us about it, let us go on as usual, and say nothing either."

"Certainly," said Gertrude, "we should look very foolish asking Mrs. Stafford for the key to get out our best things. Let us say nothing, but leave it to those who are not in the secret to find out that the door is locked."

"Of course," answered Miss Steele, "the very thing. Let us wait till Miss More or the little Warringtons go up to get their Sunday things. Then, if they know nothing, they will be sure to make a fuss about the door being locked, and will ask Mrs. Stafford for the key."

This resolution was agreed to by all, and the day passed off quietly enough, as far as the eye could see, nothing being said on the subject, either by Mrs. Stafford or the girls.

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CHAPTER XII.

LILY IN TROUBLE.

It was on Wednesday, you will remember, that this Barmecide feast, as it proved to be, was to have taken place. Thursday and Friday both passed without anything occurring to disturb the surface of things in Mrs. Stafford's establishment, and the dreaded Saturday had now arrived.

Nothing was said during the morning respecting the locking of the box-room door by any of the parties concerned therein; but it was with some trepidation that the guilty individuals passed Saturday afternoon, for on that day it was a common habit with some of the girls to go up to the box-room, and take out what they intended to wear on the morrow, and at the same time little consultations and discussions were often held on the great subject of dress generally, and on the particular attire of themselves and their companions.

Neither Miss More nor Lily and Nannie

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often paid a visit to the box-room until the time when they were in actual need of the dress required, and this afternoon no one seemed disposed to leave the school-room.

They were all sitting together, employed in various ways, when the servant entered the school-room, and said that there was a poor man down-stairs with various little things—such as pincushions, needle-books, winders, and boxes, of Tunbridge-ware, and that Mrs. Stafford had allowed him to come into the hall, where any of the young ladies who pleased might purchase some of his articles.

There was an immediate adjournment of the whole party to the hall, where they all began taking up, examining, and asking the price of various things, till the poor man seemed to be half distracted.

Presently Mrs. Stafford came out, and seeing the state of things, she bade all those who did not intend to purchase anything to return at once to the school-room. As she issued this order she observed Lily hesitate a minute, when Mrs. Stafford said, "Are you wishing to make any purchases, my dear?"

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"No," replied Lily, "I think not."

"Then you had better leave, I think," said Mrs. Stafford, "for it quite confuses the poor man to have so many of you about him."

Lily accordingly went up-stairs with some of the other girls.

Now, the fact was that Lily had set her heart very much upon buying a little box for containing postage-stamps, as a present for papa, whose birth-day was in October, but she had asked the price of the little box, and found that it was two shillings and sixpence, and that was one shilling more than her purse contained. Miss More offered immediately to lend her the shilling, and Lily felt strongly tempted to borrow it of her, for she knew mamma would send them some more money shortly, when she sent the promised box containing their winter things; but she had promised mamma that she never would, under any circumstances, borrow money of the young ladies; so, after hesitating a few minutes, she declined Miss More's offer. Still, however, she held the little box in her hand, wishing that one shilling and sixpence could be made enough to buy it, or that Nannie

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THE MYSTERY OF THE BOX. [*Page* 171.

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had a shilling, instead of only a solitary four-penny-piece. She looked over the contents of the man's tray, but could find nothing there besides suitable for a gentleman; silk winders and wax-holders were the only things within her limited means, and they would be of no use to papa. Reluctantly laying down the little box, therefore, when Mrs. Stafford spoke to her, she returned to the school-room.

Soon afterwards those girls who had stayed below came up and began exhibiting their purchases to one another, when the bell rang for tea; the various pretty things were, therefore, hastily laid aside upon the shelves, and the whole party went down-stairs.

After tea Lily went into the school-room and fetched her work-basket from her shelf as usual, when on entering the dining-room Mrs. Stafford called her to her, as she wished to give her some directions respecting the collar which she was working. As Mrs. Stafford took it from her basket, she said, "So you bought the little box after all, my dear." Lily looked up, colouring red with surprise and pleasure, as she saw the much-desired box.

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"No," said Lily, "I did not buy it, but Miss More, I think—I suppose——"

"What is it, my dear?" asked Miss More, who now came into the room.

"Why, you are accused of the crime of buying a little box for Miss Warrington," said Miss Steele.

"That little box?" said Miss More; "I did not buy it. I offered to lend Lily the money, but she declined to borrow any."

"How is it, then, that you have it in your basket, Lily?" asked Mrs. Stafford.

"I do not in the least know," replied Lily; "but I am certain I did not put it there."

"Did any of you purchase this little box to-day?" said Mrs. Stafford, addressing the whole party, who were now assembled round the table. There was a profound silence for a minute, and then Mrs. Stafford said again, "Do any of you know anything about this little box?"

"I saw it in Miss Warrington's hand, when we were looking over the man's things," replied Miss Manners; "and I have seen nothing of it since, until now."

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"There is something about this that I do not at all like," said Mrs. Stafford. "Are you quite sure that you, none of you, saw this little box amongst the other things, after Miss Warrington went up-stairs?"

"Did you? Did you?" whispered Miss Steele to several of the other girls.

"No," was the reply from all.

Poor Lily became quite frightened, and, finding the attention of the whole room directed towards her, she burst into tears.

This appeared to arouse Mrs. Stafford's suspicions still more, for she looked very grave and sorrowful, saying, "I cannot—I cannot believe that any little girl could be so wicked as to take a little thing like this from a poor man, when she had not the means of paying for it. There is something suspicious certainly in the box being found in your basket, Lily; but I shall now take it into my possession, believing that we may in time be able to clear up the whole in some way. At all events, I shall leave no means untried in order to do so."

At first, Lily felt so confused and bewildered that she hardly knew what Mrs. Stafford had

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been saying, or understood that any positive suspicions had been excited as to her having actually stolen the little box; but the whispers and inuendos of some of the girls, as they were going up-stairs to bed, made her at last fully aware that this was really the fact, even if Gertrude had not thrown her arms around her, and protested that if all the judges and all the juries in England believed that Lily had taken the box, she never, never would, even to her dying day.

Miss More also attempted to comfort her, by assuring her that there was no doubt but that it would be all cleared up in some way, and she used all her ingenuity to discover how the little box could have got into Lily's work-basket.

Poor Lily was, as you may imagine, very unhappy that night, and not all the consciousness of her own innocence could mitigate the suffering she experienced from the dreadful thought that others regarded her as a thief.

She knew that she had done nothing wrong herself now, but the idea that others thought she had, laid hold of her mind in such a way that

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she could hardly even cry to God to help her. She almost felt as though she could no longer believe in her Heavenly Father's love and care, who had permitted this great trial to fall upon her.

Lily's was not, however, the only troubled spirit in the school that night, although she suffered by far the most, but there were anxious thoughts and discussions passing in the other bed-rooms, as to what was to be done on the morrow without Sunday bonnets, dresses, or mantles.

Great surprise was expressed that nothing had been said by Miss More, or either of the occupants of her room, about the locked door. Either they must be in the secret, and have obtained permission from Mrs. Stafford to fetch what they wanted from the box-room, or they must intend, as the weather looked threatening, to wear their common things to-morrow.

There was generally a prevalent wish in the school that the Sunday might be fine; but on this morning it was with some satisfaction that grey clouds were seen to cover the sky.

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Not that it positively rained, but it had just enough of a threatening look to have justified some very prudent and cautious old lady in returning, with a regretful look, her go-to-meeting bonnet and cloak to their week-day band-box, and substituting more homely attire; but it was scarcely sufficient to induce such young ladies as Miss Manners and Miss Cotton, under ordinary circumstances, to be so careful.

The every day dresses must, however, be put on; the only thing to be done was to brighten them up as much as possible with pretty neck-ribbons; and at length the bell rang, and the whole party assembled in the dining-room. Miss Cotton and Miss Manners looked round with anxiety as they entered the room. There sat Miss More, Lily, and Nannie, and Annie Shepherd, all in their best dresses.

What could be the meaning of it? Mrs. Stafford surely must know. It must be her doing, especially as she made no remark all day, and did not even appear to observe the extraordinary fact that three-quarters of her establishment were not so well dressed as

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usual. We can only hope that the congregation were equally unobservant.

To Lily, this Sabbath was one of strange, yet not altogether sad, thoughts. Constantly tempted as she was to dwell on the idea of her disgrace in the eyes of her companions, she yet endeavoured to put the thought away from her mind. She felt that the favour of God through Jesus Christ, was still upon her, and she could thank Him that it was no real sin into which she had fallen, and which might come between her and her Father in heaven. She tried also to look upon the trial as sent to teach her something, and to find out what that lesson might be, and then it came into her mind more strongly than it had ever done before, that she had often loved the praise of men more than the praise of God, and she saw, now that the commendation of others was taken from her, how much she had sought it as the motive of her life, and how much she cared for it. This she sincerely confessed before God, and prayed for grace from henceforth to live more entirely as His child, looking up to Him for His smile upon all she did, and animated in it by love to

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Him, and a desire to do all that could please Him.

And now there came many bright and happy thoughts into her mind—such as God sends to those who are in trouble, but who are willing to take that trouble as sent by Him, and to learn all that He intends to teach from it—pleasant thoughts that hide the dark cloud even when it is still there. Last night it seemed as though she never could be happy again, but now she felt almost sure that even in this world light and gladness were sown for her.

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CHAPTER XIII.

SOME EXPLANATIONS.

MONDAY morning found the various characters of our story much in the same position as we left them in the last chapter.

"To-day, surely, Mrs. Stafford will speak out," thought the heroines of the box-room. "Now that she has punished us as she intended, it will all be brought to light, and we may as well prepare for some scenes."

"To-day," thought Lily, "Mrs. Stafford will be able, most likely, to prove that I am innocent; some unexpected discovery will be made, and I shall be cleared."

But this Monday, which was expected by so many to be a day of remarkable events, passed exactly as usual, nothing occurring in any way to change the position of affairs already related.

And so also passed several days, until one morning after school, as Miss Cotton and Miss Steele were passing along the passage from the

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school-room, they were met by the housekeeper, who said to them—

"Have you forgotten your cakes and fruit, Miss, that you haven't had the key for so long? they'll all be spoiled, if you don't look after them."

Miss Cotton was about to exclaim in surprise, "Are they in the store-closet?" when Miss Steele, pressing her arm, said, "Ah, to be sure, let us have the key now, and go down there."

The housekeeper gave them the key, and the young ladies went down to the store-closet. The door was opened, and what was their surprise to see all the good things, as well as those which had been especially provided for the feast, including the bottles of ginger-beer, and the "lovely *meringues*," all arranged with the greatest order upon the shelves of the cupboard.

The mystery appeared to be greater than ever, and was utterly unfathomable to the perceptions of Miss Cotton and Miss Steele. They could only eat, and gaze, and wonder. A subsequent visit, which they ventured to

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pay to the box-room, discovered to them that everything there was in its usual state, all traces of the great affair having wholly disappeared. The door was unlocked, and the key taken away again.

It now dawned upon their minds that very probably all this had been carried into effect before Sunday, and that Miss More and the Warringtons had found the way unobstructed when they went to fetch their best things on Saturday evening.

This was the more vexatious, for, as Miss Cotton observed, "It was monstrous provoking to think that they had been punishing themselves all for nothing at all."

The strange intelligence was then communicated to the others; and after various attempts at unravelling the mystery, and many discussions on the subject, during sundry visits to the store-closet, the good things themselves at length vanished away, and nothing remained to tell the tale of the intended feast in the box-room.

Poor Lily did not so soon get out of her troubles. It is true that the other girls ap-

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peared to have forgotten the circumstance, for nothing was now said about it, and she was treated in every way as she had been before, both by Mrs. Stafford and her companions; still the thought was often in her mind, and she felt that until it was explained, she could not feel altogether happy.

She went about her regular work, however, as industriously and steadily as she could, making more progress than she had done at any time, and looking up continually to God for His help and approval in all that she did. Thus the time passed until the month of November had come to an end, and the girls no longer counted the weeks, but the days, and even the hours, to the twenty-first of December, when the holidays would begin.

It was about the first or second day of the last month, that Mrs. Stafford entered the school-room one morning, with her bonnet and cloak on, saying, "Are all the young ladies present?"

"Yes," replied Miss Jackson, looking round; "I think they are all here."

"Then," said Mrs. Stafford, "I must in-

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terrupt the usual lessons for a little while, as I have something important which I wish to say to them. I was walking down Milsom Street just now, when I saw on the other side of the way the poor man who called here about two months ago with little articles of Tunbridge-ware for sale. It suddenly occurred to me that he could explain, probably, the mystery of that little box which, you remember, was found in Miss Lily Warrington's work-basket; so, crossing over, I stopped him, and inquired if he recollected calling at my house with his things, and that one of the young ladies wished very much to purchase a certain little box for stamps?

"'To be sure,' he replied. 'It was a little girl, and she hadn't quite money enough, so I wanted her to take something else instead, but she said she would have nothing but that, because it was for a present for her papa.'

"'Did you miss the little box afterwards?' I inquired of the man.

"'Oh, no, ma'am,' said he; 'another of the young ladies bought it, just as the little miss laid it down and went away.'

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"'Another of the young ladies?' I repeated. 'What was she like? Should you know her again if you were to see her?'

"'Yes,' replied the man, 'I should know her quite well, for she bought more of me than any of the others. I think she laid out a matter of fifteen shillings with me altogether. I remember she said as her papa was an independent gentleman, and sent her as much money as ever she pleased. Then, when the little lady put down the box and said it cost too much, I says to the other, "'Twon't be too much for you, miss; you may as well take it;" and so she did. She was rather stout, with a round white face, and her hair turned off.'

"I then desired the man to come round with me to the house," continued Mrs. Stafford, "and he is waiting in the hall ready to identify the young lady, unless she is willing to spare herself further disgrace by confessing the whole publicly and at once."

There was a few minutes' silence, every eye being turned towards Miss Cotton, to whom the description applied too well to be mistaken. At last she sobbed out, "I bought the little

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box, but I didn't put it in Lily's basket, indeed I didn't."

"Then how did it get there?" inquired Mrs. Stafford, severely.

"I do not in the least know," said Miss Cotton, "and that's the truth; it really is."

"Where did you put it when you came down to tea?" asked Mrs. Stafford.

"The bell rang while we were looking at the things we had bought," replied Miss Cotton, "and I put mine all in a heap upon my shelf, and then, perhaps, the box rolled off, and fell into Lily's basket, which was just underneath."

"That is quite possible," said Mrs. Stafford, looking at the shelf; "but why in the world did you not tell me when I asked you all that evening that you had bought it?"

"I was just going to," answered Miss Cotton, "but Priscilla Steele trod so hard upon my foot—as she does when she means me not to tell anything—that I didn't like to say that it was mine."

"And what possible reason could induce Miss Steele to attempt to prevent your telling

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me that you had bought it?" said Mrs. Stafford.

"We were very angry with Lily, and I suppose she thought it would pay her out," answered Miss Cotton.

"Angry with Lily? And what for?" was Mrs. Stafford's next inquiry; and Miss Cotton, utterly unconscious of the expressions of anxiety and consternation depicted upon almost every face, and not having Miss Steele at hand to tread upon her foot, blurted out—"Because she told you of the feast we intended to have in the box-room."

"A feast in the box-room!" exclaimed Mrs. Stafford, with astonishment. "I never heard a word of this, until this moment; when was it, pray?"

"And I am sure I did not tell Mrs. Stafford," exclaimed Lily; "for I never knew that you were going to have one."

"Oh," cried Gertrude, jumping up, "I had not the least idea that you suspected Lily of telling Mrs. Stafford. I knew you thought she had found it out; but if I had only known that you were playing this shameful trick upon

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Lily out of revenge for that, why I should have told you all about it long ago."

"Then, tell us all about it now, if you please," said Mrs. Stafford.

"Well, then," began Gertrude, "Miss Cotton and Miss Steele came to me one day, after school, and told me that they were going to have a feast that very night in the box-room, after we went up-stairs to bed. At first I thought it would be capital fun, but then I remembered something Mrs. Warrington had said to me one day in the holidays, about doing things secretly; so I was going to say that I would have nothing to do with it, when I found that the other girls thought I was hesitating because I was afraid, and that roused me up, and I did not like to refuse. Then I discovered that all that they wanted me for was to carry the fruit and cakes from the store-closet to the box-room, which they none of them could make up their minds to venture to do; so I said directly that I would undertake to do that without being seen, and I did. At that time I did not intend to have anything to do with the supper, though I

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did not exactly know how I was going to get out of it. But while we were up-stairs in the box-room, hiding among the things, Miss Cotton, I think it was, observed that there was no key in the lock of the door, and how much she wished they could lock the door, so that no one might see the things. Then it came into my mind that it would be capital fun to lock them out; so, when they went down-stairs, I tried several keys from the bed-room doors, until I had found one that would lock the box-room. I did not lock the door then, because I thought that they would very likely go up there again after school, so I waited till the evening. And while I was practising in the drawing-room, I heard Miss Steele and Miss Cotton go up-stairs. I thought most likely they were going to set out the feast, and as soon as they came down again, I ran up-stairs, got the key, and went to the box-room. There was the supper already set out on the boxes, covered with a sheet; so I locked the door, and came down-stairs again, just in time for prayers. When we all went up to the box-room, after the

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teachers had gone round, of course we could not get in, and the girls were in a terrible fright, because they thought that Mrs. Stafford must have heard about it in some way, and had locked them out. They never suspected me, and I thought it was just as well they should be a little alarmed about it. The next day they asked me to go up and see if the door were really fastened, which I did, and told them on my return that it actually was. Then they fancied that Mrs. Stafford meant to punish them by locking the door, and thus preventing them from getting their Sunday things. This reminded me that some of the girls who knew nothing about the feast would be going to the box-room on Saturday afternoon to fetch down their best clothes, so on Saturday morning I asked the housekeeper for the key of the store-closet, and taking a basket, I carried all the provisions down to the cupboard, and put all the boxes and the sheet back into their proper places again. The girls did not know that the box-room door was open, and all but Miss More, Lily and Nannie, and Annie Shepherd, came out on Sunday in

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their common things. I believe the housekeeper afterwards told Miss Cotton that the provisions were down in the store-closet; and the girls went there and ate them up; and that was the end of the feast; and that is all I have to tell about it."

Mrs. Stafford here sent Miss Jackson to give the poor man with the Tunbridge-ware a shilling, and to tell him that he might leave now, as she should not require to see him again.

Then she said—"As far as those engaged in the feast are concerned, I think they must have already suffered sufficient punishment in the dread of discovery, which has so long hung over them; I do not wish, however, to pass over the affair too lightly, for though in itself only a frolic, you well know how much I dislike anything that is carried on secretly, and I think it impossible that such things can be done without a great deal of downright falsehood and deceit in various ways. I know the temptation of the daring and fun of such proceedings, but I do think that all perfectly honourable, truthful, and open characters must recoil from them with disgust. I need not repeat, however,

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what I have so often said upon this subject. I have something to say also with regard to the conduct of Gertrude in this affair, and that is, that although she did not actually take part in it, yet I think it would have been much more straightforward, if instead of taking the punishment of her companions into her own hands, by practising a trick upon them, she had at once put the truth before them in its own light, and declined to have anything to do with what she felt to be wrong. In that way she might have succeeded in dissuading them from it, on far higher grounds than by locking them out, and amusing herself by playing upon their fears.

"Of the conduct of Miss Steele, in endeavouring to throw a false accusation upon an innocent companion, I cannot suffer myself now to speak. Its baseness is such, that I scarcely think I could retain a young lady in my establishment who could be guilty of a crime like this. I must have time, however, to reflect upon what is the right thing to do. And I hope to be guided by a higher wisdom than my own in fixing on what course it would be best to pursue.

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"I need scarcely say that Miss Warrington is perfectly cleared from all the suspicions which some of you may have thought rested upon her. As far as I am concerned myself, I have been so long accustomed to judge of character, that I never for one moment believed her guilty of the crime which circumstances appeared to throw upon her, but felt assured that in some way the truth would be brought to light sooner or later.

"I do not wish you to return to your lessons this morning, but would rather that you should employ the little time that remains before the dinner hour, in thinking over what has occurred, and endeavouring to profit by it."

Saying this, Mrs. Stafford left the room. There was a deep silence for a little while, and then Lily had to receive the congratulations of most of her companions on the explanation which had taken place, and strong expressions of regret from Gertrude, that she should in any way have been the cause of bringing this trouble on her.

Miss Steele and Miss Cotton went off to their

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room, where, with Mrs. Stafford's consent, they spent the rest of the day.

Lily's heart was light once more, but she did not forget in her joy, those who were in sorrow; and she determined to take the first opportunity of begging Mrs. Stafford to allow Miss Steele to remain, and to pass over this offence.

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CHAPTER XIV.

GOING HOME.

"ONLY eight days to the holidays, this morning," exclaimed Nannie, one day, soon after the events recorded in the last chapter. "Can you believe, Lily, that on Wednesday week we shall be really at home once more?"

"No, indeed," replied Lily, as she took one pin out of the row of nine stuck in the pin-cushion on the toilet-table. "How strange it will seem to see the house again, and to sleep once more in our dear little old room. Why, it is nine months since that morning when we came away and left it!"

"And how much baby must have grown. Mamma says he is getting such a fine little fellow. I do not believe we shall be able to carry him, he will be so heavy," said Nannie. "And the boys, I dare say Alf is as high as papa's shoulder. I wonder which day they come home. How happy we shall be all together again."

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"And won't it be fine to have Gertrude with us," said Lily. "I am sure we shall have a merry Christmas, at all events. And then Aunt Sarah is to come and see us soon after."

"Yes," said Nannie, "and I wonder how we are to go home. Do you think papa will come and fetch us?"

"I do not know," replied Lily. "Mamma said the last time she wrote, you know, that she had not arranged it yet, but that she would soon be able to tell us. Perhaps we shall have a letter to-day."

"Do you think we shall come back again to school," asked Nannie, presently, "after the holidays are over? Mamma said, when we came, she was going to send us for a little while only; but when I asked her about it last holidays, she said that she could not tell how it would be."

"I scarcely know," answered Lily; "but I shouldn't wonder if mamma kept us at home now."

"Oh, how nice that would be," said Nannie, "to be always at home."

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The breakfast-bell rang, and Lily and Nannie ran down, full of happy thoughts of home, the return to which now seemed to be so near.

There was no letter for them from mamma that day, but the morning lessons were scarcely over, when a servant entered the school-room, and announced that the Miss Warringtons were wanted in the drawing-room.

Full of eager anticipations, away they flew, and found there—Aunt Sarah!

After the first greetings were over, she told them that she had received a letter from mamma that morning, in which she said that papa found it would be impossible to leave London on the twenty-first, in order to fetch the little girls from school, and she was quite at a loss, therefore, how to arrange for their coming on that day, though very anxious that they should not be delayed. Grandpapa had therefore proposed that Thomas should take the charge of them to town, and as he had never paid a visit to London in his life, he was to stay there for a few days and see the sights, especially the "Queen's crownd" and "the beasteses in Smithfield," which a friend of his had informed him

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LILY FOUND NANNIE LYING ON ONE OF THE FORMS IN THE SCHOOL-ROOM.

[*Page* 197.

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were the two things most worth seeing in London.

Aunt Sarah stayed all day, and the time was passed in forming pleasant plans for the holidays, when she would be in town, and in anticipating the many coming enjoyments of that time.

In the evening, as she bade them good-bye, she reminded them that she should not see them again until they met at home at the beginning of the new year, and they both promised, if mamma would allow them, to come to Paddington with papa, and meet her on her arrival in town.

It was not long after Aunt Sarah left, that Lily found Nannie lying on one of the forms in the school-room, complaining very much of head-ache, and when she came down to tea, she looked so flushed and unwell, that Mrs. Stafford desired her to go to bed immediately afterwards.

In about half-an-hour Mrs. Stafford visited her, taking her some simple medicine, when, finding her disposed to be drowsy, she hoped that by the next morning she would be quite

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well again, and desiring her not to get up until she had seen her, she bade her good-night. She, however, passed a very restless and disturbed night, complaining much of the pain in her head, and of being so hot, often speaking incoherently of going home, and sometimes addressing papa and mamma, as though they were actually present.

Miss More got up several times during the night to bathe her head, and try as far as she could to make her more comfortable, and as soon as it was light, she dressed and went to Mrs. Stafford's room, telling her that she feared Nannie was really very unwell.

Mrs. Stafford came to her at once, and saw much in her appearance to make her feel that it was not a passing indisposition. She said nothing, however, to the other girls in the room, but desired them to rise and dress as quickly as they could, as she thought it better that the room should be kept as quiet as possible.

By this time the servants were gone down, and Mrs. Stafford requested them to make some tea, a cup of which she herself brought to Nannie, and after drinking it she became less

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uneasy, appearing even disposed to sleep. Miss More, Annie Shepherd, and Lily were now dressed, so Mrs. Stafford, having darkened the room, bade the two former come with her, while she left Lily, at her earnest entreaty, to watch beside her sister.

Lily at first felt rather frightened, as she sat in the darkened room, where all was so still, listening to Nannie's heavy breathings, so at last, rising softly, she went on tip-toe to the dressing-table and took up the little Testament, out of which she was accustomed to read a few verses with Nannie every morning, returning then as quietly as possible to the chair, near Nannie's bedside. The movement, though so slight, was sufficient to rouse Nannie from her uneasy slumber, and opening her eyes, she saw Lily sitting with the little book beside her.

"Haven't we forgotten to read this morning?" said Nannie, presently.

"No," replied Lily; "I was just going to, but you were asleep, and I did not like to disturb you. Shall I read out loud?"

"Yes, please," replied Nannie.

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"It is the last six verses of the thirteenth chapter of St. John, I think," said Lily.

"No," answered Nannie, "we read those yesterday. It is the first six verses of the fourteenth chapter to-day."

"Ah, so it is," replied Lily, and she began to read: "Let not your heart be troubled."

"It reminds me," said Nannie, when Lily had finished, "of that piece of poetry mamma used to say to us:—

"'There is a happy land,
Far, far away——'

But I forget what the rest of it is."

"Shall I read you something else?" asked Lily.

"Yes, please," said Nannie. "The Lord is my shepherd."

Lily repeated the whole of the twenty-third Psalm, and then said, "Oh, Nannie, don't you recollect the day when we learnt that Psalm? We were sitting together by mamma upon a hassock, and I remember Herbert would keep on making us laugh, and mamma was obliged to send him out of the room. It seems such ages

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ago. Why it was before the boys went to school."

"Yes," said Nannie, "it was on a Sunday evening, before we were any of us old enough to go out to the evening service; and I remember that mamma afterwards told us about Jesus being the Good Shepherd, who had given His life for His sheep, and she read to us the story of 'The Two Lambs,' and of how little Peace stayed in the fold, and was taken at last to the beautiful pastures around the Shepherd's own home."

The servant here entered the room, to say that Mrs. Stafford had sent for the medical man, who had just arrived, and would come up and see Nannie.

"Good-bye," said Lily, as she left the room. "I shall come up again directly the doctor is gone, and see how you are."

Lily went down-stairs to the dining-room, where she found the other girls just beginning breakfast. Mrs. Stafford had gone up-stairs with the doctor, and Lily listened anxiously to hear them come down again.

Soon she heard their steps; but they went

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into the drawing-room, and some little time elapsed before Mrs. Stafford returned to the party at breakfast.

"May I go to Nannie now?" Lily asked, as Mrs. Stafford entered the room.

"No, my dear," replied Mrs. Stafford; "I would rather you did not return to your sister to-day. Mr. Richardson hopes that this is merely a slight feverish attack, from which she will soon recover; but as he cannot, at this stage, be quite certain of the nature of her indisposition, he considers it better that none of you should go near her room, at least until he has seen her again, which he hopes to do later in the day."

"Oh! I promised I would come back directly," said Lily. "Do let me go, Mrs. Stafford. I have been with her all night, and I am sure I have got no harm."

"My dear," replied Mrs. Stafford, "I am most sorry to keep you from your sister, but I think it is due to your parents to take every precaution in my power to prevent your taking the disease, if it should prove to be any malady of an infectious character."

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"I am sure papa and mamma would like me to be with Nannie," urged Lily.

"I cannot take upon myself the responsibility, my dear," replied Mrs. Stafford. "I shall send for a nurse for your sister whom I know well, and on whom I can rely for kindness and judgment, and you may be sure everything that can be done for her comfort shall be attended to. I hope the second visit of the medical man may render these precautions no longer necessary. In the meantime I must beg you to be as quiet and attentive to my wishes as possible."

Lily therefore returned with the other girls to the school-room, but it was in vain that she attempted to fix her mind on her usual studies. Not that she really apprehended any danger, for all that she had known of illness was simply occasional slight attacks of indisposition, from which she, or her brothers, or sister, had always recovered in a few days; but she could not bear the thought that Nannie was suffering and alone, or at least only under the care of a hired nurse. She knew that her sister would be wishing for her, and she longed intensely

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to go to her. They had never been separated from one another even for a day, and now, under these circumstances, the separation was most hard to bear. Still, she resolved to try and be patient, and to hope, and pray, that the doctor on his second visit might find that there was no occasion for keeping her any longer from her sister.

The day passed wearily away. A certain feeling of awe seemed to rest upon most of the girls, as if there were a solemn presence in the house; others, of a different temperament, could not resist that sensation of peculiar excitement, which is produced in some characters by the occurrence of anything unusual, and which is sometimes wrongly supposed to indicate a want of feeling, the fact being that what depresses many natures acts upon others as a kind of stimulant.

All the young ladies were very kind to Lily, and did what they could in their various ways to cheer and comfort her. Much sympathy and affection were also called forth for Nannie, for she was so quiet and unobtrusive in her daily life, that few had felt till now how much

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they unconsciously loved and respected her. It was very rarely that she called up any particular admiration or affection by any distinct action, it was only in thinking of her, now especially, and when all were led to speak about her, that it was found what a hold she actually had upon all their hearts. Her life had been made up so much of little duties faithfully performed, little acts of kindness, frequently unknown, even to the receiver, little and often silent testimonies to what was true and right, that no one had observed or suspected the influence possessed by so simple and insignificant a child, until the circumstance of her possible danger, and separation from them, caused them all to turn towards her, with a feeling something like self-reproach.

All the day Lily listened anxiously for the step of the doctor upon the stairs. Many came and went from the house, but it was five o'clock in the afternoon before, peeping through the school-room door, she saw him and Mrs. Stafford going up-stairs.

Nearly an hour passed away, and Mrs. Stafford did not come, as she had promised to

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do, to tell Lily what his report might be. At length the bell rang for tea, and they all went down to the dining-room. She was not there, and Miss Jackson took her place at the tea-table. Scarcely a word was spoken during the meal, and very little eaten, for all felt sorrowful and alarmed, though they scarcely knew why.

They were about to rise from the table, when Mrs. Stafford entered the room, looking anxious and very grave. She took her accustomed seat, and after a moment's silence, she said—

"My dear children, you will all be grieved to hear that the medical man thinks Nannie Warrington very ill indeed. He considers it to be gastric fever, and, under these circumstances, I have come to the decision that it would perhaps be more satisfactory to your parents for you at once to leave the house. I shall, therefore, send you all home by an early train to-morrow morning. Before the post leaves to-night I shall write to announce your arrival to your friends. I am truly sorry for you to leave in this sudden manner, and that you should lose the remaining week of your studies. I think, however, that it is the best plan for you, and

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the one most likely to meet with the approval of your parents. This evening I must beg you, with the assistance of the teachers and housekeeper, to spend in packing your things, as I should like everything to be ready to-night, in order that you may start the first thing in the morning."

Mrs. Stafford then rose, and requesting Miss Jackson to desire the servant to bring her some tea to her own sitting-room, she took Lily by the hand and led her there.

"Oh, Mrs. Stafford!" was all Lily could say, "I must go and see Nannie. I am sure she wants me!"

"My dear child," replied Mrs. Stafford, "your sister is so ill that she would not know you if you were to go to her, you could not therefore help or comfort her in any way; and only think how much greater the distress of your papa and mamma would be if they found that both their little girls were ill instead of one. I have written to your papa to tell him of your sister's illness, by the middle of the day's post, and I shall send a telegraphic message again to-night,

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when the doctor and another medical man will see her, so that I think it most probable you will see your dear parents here by the first train to-morrow morning. Then, if they wish it, you shall be with your sister; but I cannot act without their permission in this matter, because you are under my care, and it is my duty to keep you if possible from all harm."

Lily could only cry most bitterly, till Mrs. Stafford laid her on the sofa, and when she had become more composed, continued:

"I said just now that there was nothing which you could do for your sister, but you can pray for her, and beg that your heavenly Father will be with her, and, if it is His will, restore her again to health. Remember that all that He is doing, and will do with her, will be in perfect love to her, for I believe that she is His child, through Jesus Christ our Saviour. She has not waited until now to come to God through His Son, and seek the pardon of her sins and the removal of her sinful nature, so that she is, by God's grace, prepared for life or death, according to His will. For a short time this afternoon,

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after taking something, she appeared to revive for a time, and Nurse heard her repeating to herself the little hymn—

'I lay my sins on Jesus,
The spotless Lamb of God.'"

"And does the doctor think her so very ill?" asked Lily, rising now from the sofa.

"The fever is not so violent, my dear," replied Mrs. Stafford, "as to occasion any great alarm; but she has sunk so rapidly during the day, that it has awakened very serious apprehensions. At the same time, we shall take every possible means to keep up her strength, and can only seek God's blessing upon them."

Lily now left the room, for she knew that Mrs. Stafford had a great many letters to write before the post closed, and she saw that she wished to be busy.

She went up-stairs to the bed-rooms, but here all was bustle and confusion. The boxes had all been brought down, and the beds and furniture were covered with heaps of articles placed ready for packing. The children were rushing to and fro, some crying, others

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laughing at the happy prospect of actually being at home to-morrow, and with those dear ones, whom they had not expected to see for another week.

Lily looked about among the busy flock for Miss More, but was told, on inquiry, that she would find her in the spare room, whither her things, and those of Annie Shepherd, had been removed from Nannie's room.

Here Lily sought her, and found her busy packing her own and Annie Shepherd's boxes. Lily volunteered her assistance, and before very long, the undertaking was completed.

"Do you know you are to sleep with me in this room to-night, Lily?" said Nellie More, as they were leaving the room, intending to see if they could render any help to any one else.

"I am glad of that," replied Lily, though a pang shot through her heart to think that, for the first time she could remember, she should not have Nannie for her companion.

"And I am going to sleep with Gertrude March," said Annie Shepherd; "and she says she shall give me such kicks."

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They went to the other rooms, but found most of them deserted. There stood the great boxes ready to be carried down-stairs in the morning, and the disappearance of the ordinary little articles lying on the dressing-tables and mantel-shelves, the tattered look of the floors strewn with pieces of paper and other little odds and ends of rubbish, gave the rooms that strangely vacant, desolate appearance that makes one feel as if all were over, and every one gone from us.

Could it be possible that only yesterday Aunt Sarah was here, and all those pleasant plans talked over for the holidays? That only yesterday morning Nannie and she had risen full of hope and joy in the expectation of "going home?"

These thoughts pressed themselves into Lily's mind, and she felt that she had never been so sad and miserable in all her life.

Miss Manners had called Nellie More into the next room to help her in putting in her innumerable articles of finery, and Lily was left alone for a few minutes in the deserted apartment which they had first entered.

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She covered her face with her hands, and again gave way to a violent flood of tears. She tried to pray, but all that she could say was, "O God, make Nannie well again, for Jesus Christ's sake!" Then she remembered that perhaps papa and mamma might be here, even to-morrow morning—and it was a great comfort to think of that—and by that time Nannie might be better, for Mrs. Stafford had said that the doctor did not think the fever violent.

It was now half-past nine o'clock, and several of the girls came up-stairs, having gone down to take their supper. They said that Mrs. Stafford had wished them all at once to retire to rest, and they offered to fetch Lily some supper. This she refused; but, finding that Nellie More was still assisting Miss Manners, she thought she would go down and see if she could find any one who could tell her anything about her sister.

Just as she had descended the first flight of stairs she saw a very pleasant-looking old woman coming along the passage leading to Nannie's room. She at once suspected that

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it was the nurse, and asked her if she could tell how Nannie was.

"Ah! Miss," replied she; "she is just sinking and sinking continually, and all we can give her don't seem to do her any good."

"Does she know any one?" asked Lily.

"She seems mostly to be in a sort of doze," replied the nurse; "but now and then she will revive a bit. I noticed just now, when Mrs. Stafford came into the room and told me to go down and have my supper, that she opened her eyes, and looked as if she wanted to say something, but she was too weak."

Lily went up-stairs again, where she found that Nellie More had finished her work; and they went together to the spare room.

"How is your sister? Have you heard anything of her since tea-time?" asked Nellie More.

"Oh, Miss More," replied Lily, "Nurse says that she is so weak that she is sinking continually. Do pray to God that she may get well!"

"My dear," said Nellie More, "I will try to do so; but it is only of late, since I knew you

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and Nannie, that I have begun to feel that we can come really to God as a Father and ask Him for all that we need. I was taught as a child to repeat a prayer, and I used to think that the form was all that I wanted. I never understood it as an actual asking for what we really want each day; but I cannot help thinking now that there is something more in religion than I have ever known—something truer and deeper, and that is fit for every-day life, wherever we are, and which will fit us, too, to die."

"Yes," said Lily; "but God will teach us all things by his Holy Spirit, and make it all plain; and we can always come to Jesus Christ, and seek for His salvation; and when our sins are pardoned we are at peace with God, through His Son."

"I have always tried to do what was right; but I must think more about these things," said Nellie, thoughtfully.

But little more conversation passed between them that night, though neither slept much, Lily scarcely at all.

At length the light began to break, and by

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degrees the various objects in the room became visible; and Lily heard various sounds in the house, as though persons were up and about. Miss More was to leave with the others by an early train, and she now therefore waked her, telling her that the others were getting up.

Miss More had scarcely risen before there was a tap at the door, and Mrs. Stafford entered the room. She was dressed just as she had been the night before, and looked so pale and sad that any one might have guessed that she had been up all night.

"How is Nannie?" exclaimed Lily, starting up.

Mrs. Stafford kissed her, and told her to lie down; then she said, very sadly, but quite calmly—

"It has pleased God to take her home—home, to be with with Him and her Saviour. All the night we have been watching her, and just as the day began to dawn, her spirit departed from earth to live in heaven."

"How! what!" exclaimed Lily, for she felt so bewildered that she could scarcely understand what Mrs. Stafford was saying.

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Presently Mrs. Stafford continued—"Last night, when I went to her, and sent the nurse down-stairs for a little, she evidently recognised me, and she asked me if she were not very ill. I told her that we feared she was. Then she said—'If I do not get well, tell papa, and mamma, and Lily, and the boys that I am always thinking about them, and I shall be waiting for them to come too; but I shall be with Jesus, and the time will not seem long.' Here she became too much exhausted to say any more, and did not speak again, nor do I think that after that she was conscious of anything going on around her. The medical men came about eleven o'clock, but she did not seem to be aware of their presence. It is indeed a strange and terrible loss to you, my poor child," said she, as she kissed Lily. "May God give you strength to bear it." And she left the room.

It seemed all so like a horrible dream to Lily, that she could not yet realise that it was true that she should never see Nannie again. She could not be actually gone from this world—she who, only a day or two be-

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fore, had been so full of life and joyous anticipation at the thought of returning to her earthly home! It seemed impossible that Lily was to live on and on, and perhaps even grow up, without the little sister, from whom she had never before been separated even for a day. It had come upon her so strangely and suddenly that she could not as yet receive into her mind an idea so altogether new and unanticipated, and she felt nothing but a peculiar sort of numbness all over her, which prevented her from crying or even moving a limb.

After a while Nellie More came to her, ready dressed for her journey, but she could make no reply to her friend's kind expressions of compassion and sympathy, as she bade her an affectionate farewell.

Then she heard the various sounds in the house of running up and down stairs, slamming of doors, the thumping of the boxes as they were carried to the hall, and finally the driving away of cabs and carriages, conveying her companions from the door; and she felt as though she were left alone in a most dreary

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wilderness, far, far away from every friend or human being.

Now there was a perfect silence in the house, and soon she fell into a heavy kind of sleep, in which she continued for several hours. She was awakened by some one kissing her, and starting up, her first exclamation was, "Oh, Nannie!" till she found herself clasped in mamma's arms.

"Mamma, mamma," she cried, clinging to her, "have I been asleep? When did you come?"

"About an hour ago," replied mamma.

"Then you know it?" said Lily.

"Yes," said mamma. And Lily and she both wept together.

Presently mamma told Lily that papa was there too, and that he wished them to start soon for Ethelston House, while he would remain to make some necessary arrangements.

Then Lily got up, and, with mamma's help, was soon dressed; and about an hour afterwards they started in a fly for Ethelston House. I shall not attempt to describe minutely the grief which their unexpected

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arrival there occasioned, nor all the sadness of those first few days.

Papa rejoined them the same evening, and the next day he fetched Alfred and Herbert from school. Their arrival served in some degree to arouse poor Lily, and she endeavoured to do all she could to cheer them in their great distress, and to be a comfort to her parents; but the thought was always present to all their minds, that "us four" could never again be associated in anything they might plan or do, and whenever they spoke together there seemed to be a vacant place.

Not many days after little Nannie was laid in the vault at Ethelston, beside "little Uncle Willie," of whom she had so often spoken, and whom she had wished so much to have known. Now their bodies rested in the same grave, and their spirits rejoiced together in the same blessed home. Immediately after the funeral, the whole of the Warrington family, accompanied by Aunt Sarah, returned to London.

The Christmas Day could not but be a sad occasion, especially when they looked back upon the last, and remembered how happily

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that had been spent, when they were altogether at Ethelston House; but they tried rather to look forward than behind, and to anticipate that day when they should all be one undivided family again in their Father's House, never to be separated any more.

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CHAPTER XV.

CONCLUSION.

You will perhaps have already supposed that Lily did not return to school. To her it would have been almost too great a trial, and papa and mamma felt as though it were impossible to part with her again.

A lady was therefore engaged to come twice a week and give her lessons in music and French, while mamma again superintended her English studies; but her parents noticed that after the return of the boys to school Lily did not recover her spirits—indeed, it seemed as if she felt more and more her loneliness, and the loss of her little sister.

This gave papa and mamma much concern, for they feared that her health was becoming injured by her constant depression. After some consideration, and many consultations together, a plan was at last resolved upon which they

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hoped might give Lily pleasure, and prove in every respect beneficial to her.

During the Christmas week Lady March had died quite suddenly, so that Gertrude, though still under Mrs. Stafford's care, had now no home in England. Mr. Warrington therefore wrote to Colonel March, to propose that Gertrude should live with them, and that her education should be carried on with Lily. After some correspondence on this subject, it was at length arranged satisfactorily, and proved in every respect a source of mutual pleasure and advantage to both the little girls.

Lily thought often of her dear little sister in heaven, but she was warmly attached to Gertrude, and her kind-heartedness, and active, lively disposition, made Lily feel that there was still much happiness and many pleasant things left for her in this world. Gertrude gave to papa and mamma the obedience and affection of a daughter, and, under their prudent and firm, but gentle guidance, her character developed very finely, so that she was beloved by them as one of their own children.

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And here we must leave them, with the hope that my little readers, as well as my little heroines, may learn some good truths and profitable lessons from the school-days of Lily and Nannie Warrington.

THE END.

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